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The NHS gospel

Andrew Adonis

Has Boris Johnson's resurrection on Easter Sunday converted him to the national religion? The NHS, that is, not the Church of England.

"The National Health Service is the closest thing the English have to a religion," Nigel Lawson said after his attempts to open a debate about partial privatisation failed under Thatcher. "Those who practice in it regard themselves as a priesthood and faced with a dispute between their priests and ministers, the public have no hesitation in taking the part of the priesthood."

Johnson, like Lawson an ex-editor of the *Spectator*, once sought to defrock the priests. In 2002 he invoked "the experience of other countries that have a far better record of health care provision… because they do not rely exclusively on a top-down monopolistic service of the kind we have in this country".

That would be the "top-down monopolistic service" which saved his life in St Thomas' Hospital, whose nurses – including "Luis from Portugal and Jenny from New Zealand" – he praised by name in his resurrection video.

The mechanism traditionally favoured by the Tory right to turn the NHS quickly into a residual service for the poor is to give tax breaks for private healthcare. When the Blair government removed the last of these, Johnson said: "People are being driven to use private medicine in despair at the NHS. There should be no shame in pointing that out." He isn't any longer "pointing that out".

The equally effective way to undermine the NHS is to underfund it. This is the austerity policy adopted by Tory governments since 2010. Under Blair and Brown, annual spending on the NHS increased by 6% above inflation a year, nearly double the 3.3% annual average increase under Thatcher and Major. Under Cameron/Osborne after 2010, this was slashed to barely 1% a year, raised only to 2% by May.

In last December's election, Johnson heralded billions extra for the NHS. But they amount only to a year-on-year real increase of 3.3% over the next three years, which is back to Thatcher but miles short of Blair.

Even that increase is only for the NHS. Equally important to the actual health provision needed by most of the elderly is social care, which is largely dependent on local authority budgets slashed in real terms since 2010 and still being cut. This is why Theresa May proposed her 'dementia tax' in the 2017 election.

The voters didn't think much of that idea and Johnson has not revived it. But he has no policy to deal with the escalating social care crisis for which there are now only two viable policies: make social care part of the NHS, maybe subject to means-tested charging for the 'hotel costs' element of care, or to be explicit about the logic of the existing policy of privatisation of care for most of the elderly with a residual local authority service just for the poor.

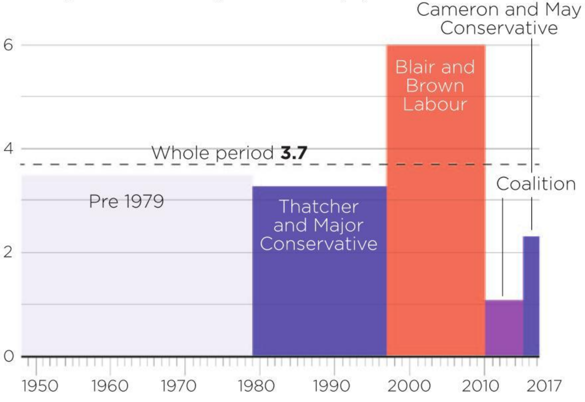
I favour the NHS option. Johnson won't tell us which he favours, which means he is privatising by default. A prime virtue of the NHS is that it both humane and efficient. It removes worry about fees and two-tier provision that applies in insurance-based systems, even those which (unlike the US system) ensure universal coverage. It also eliminates the red tape mountain of insurance systems as they allocate and recover costs and charges.

To see what might happen if we moved to an insurance system, look at the state of British dentistry. Most treatment is private, with only a residual NHS service. In large parts of the country it is virtually impossible to find an NHS practice, and those few are largely staffed by the dental equivalents of Luis from Portugal and Jenny from New Zealand.

"In the beginning was the NHS free to the faithful," begins the new Gospel according to Boris. But the next verse is equally vital: "And the Lord said: 'thou shalt end the famine of funding which afflicts my doctors, nurses and care workers. The NHS shall receive at least 4% real growth in spending from taxation each year, lest it otherwise perish.' This is the promised land."

Health spending by different governments

Average annual real growth rate (%)



Graph source: IFS/Health Foundation

11

AUTUMN DAZE

What will our life be like by October.. back to normal or changed for good?

BY HANNAH JANE PARKINSON

12

JOURNALISM'S JEOPARDY

The media's coverage of coronavirus and a dangerous moment for the press

BY LIZ GERARD

23-24

ITALY'S IRE

Can the country forgive the EU and recover its waning Europhilia?

BY PAUL KNOTT

26-27

VIVE LA FRANCES!

Actor Frances Barber on Labour, lockdown and a longing for a post-virus party

BY TIM WALKER

29-33

BOOM AND BUSTER

The oscillating career of Buster Keaton

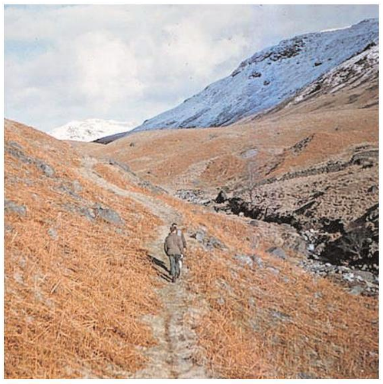
BY JAMES OLIVER

34-38

SAGES OF SIN

How art has tackled this most tempting of topics

BY RICHARD HOLLEDGE



42-43

WISTFUL FOR WALKING

The authors who comfort thwarted wanderers through lockdown

BY CHARLIE CONNELLY

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THE NEW EUROPEAN
"A POP-UP PUBLICATION"

Published in Norwich and printed by Newsprinters (Broxbourne) Ltd, Great Cambridge Road, Waltham Cross, EN8 8DY and Carn Web, Morton 3 Esky Drive, Carn Industrial Estate, Portadown, Northern Ireland.
Registered Office: Prospect House, Rouen Road, Norwich NR1 1RE

ISSN 2398-8762

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PM needs a personal exit

JAMES BALL'S DECONSTRUCTED

Boris Johnson is back at work, at least in part, after several weeks of what are almost certainly the best headlines he'll ever get. The problem for him is they were the result of his being seriously ill, and now for the birth of his son, with partner Carrie Symonds. At such a time, most people have the decency to see a human being facing critical illness and fatherhood (again), and leave politics by the wayside.

At a time of national crisis, when the media is desperate for good news stories too, that sense is heightened. Johnson provided good news first in recovery and then in new parenthood. But he may enjoy what comes next far less – he is about to face perhaps the hardest few months of any prime minister since his beloved Churchill, and will do so after several weeks away from the centre of power.

Never a man praised for his commanding grip of detail, Johnson will be able to fairly complain to colleagues he has missed weeks of decisions, of details, of evidence and of nuance – only to find himself having to catch up from a standing start.

He can expect little sympathy: this is the job he asked for, and fought tooth and nail for throughout his entire adult life. Johnson is a man acutely aware of history – at least in the sense that he would like to be remembered by it, and keeps one eye firmly on his legacy.

For a man who has so obviously wanted to be a leader in a time of national crisis, it is as if he is the apocryphal bearer of the cursed monkey claw, granted his wish but in a way that gives him nothing he actually wanted. The PM must be aware by now that no-one gets a political win from a pandemic. The true death toll in the UK is already likely well above 40,000, and there is a litany of missed opportunities, mistakes and U-turns at which future inquiries may lay blame. His role thus far, and the decisions he took before his illness, will be central to those inquiries.

In the short term, rows over why the UK didn't include itself in an EU scheme on ventilators may be what bites – but in the long run it is questions over whether Johnson acted too late, or took risks that other leaders didn't, that – along with PPE shortages– could become his legacy. He may have public support for now, but that can easily evaporate once a crisis passes.

Taking the fall for errors already exposed are what other ministers are for – Johnson has not been above letting deputy heads roll on his behalf before – and some speculate Matt Hancock is being framed up for that role.

But the real trick for Johnson to insulate himself from accountability for early errors and inattention – to get out of political jail – is to try to make them irrelevant. If he can get out of lockdown okay, his reputation will stay intact. After all, he might reason, who really holds the debacle at Gallipoli against Churchill?

In the great scheme of things, if Johnson can guide the UK out of lockdown in a way that avoids a second – potentially more severe – peak of infections, and leaves the UK less economically damaged than other countries, his overall response will be hailed as savvy. It is in Johnson's political interest – indeed it is in all of our interests – to get the outcome right. So far so good. The problem is that working out how to do that is virtually impossible, and comes with a huge flurry of almost irreconcilable pressures and the need for almost superhuman assiduity and scrutiny... not characteristics with which the PM is associated.

Generally speaking, over-reacting to a crisis comes at a political price, but not a particularly high one – especially as it is virtually impossible, even with hindsight, to determine whether a response is an over-reaction or whether the response was essential to avert the crisis. Some say the millions spent tackling the Millennium Bug were evidence of wasteful official panicking, as the year 2000 came and everything was fine. The experts involved insist that this was only *because* of the spending. When it looks like we face a major emergency, the rules on wastefulness are largely thrown out. When the government stockpiled millions of doses of Tamiflu during the swine flu epidemic – ultimately not needed – it later faced backlash for "wasting" money on the unused doses. The row, though, became something of a storm in a teacup: the public are sophisticated enough to understand it is better to have drugs and not need them than to face the opposite scenario.

The response to coronavirus is following some of the same principles: the UK government ordered $20 million of tests for the virus, without being sure they worked, in the hope that they would – as others would have snapped up first refusal otherwise. In the circumstances, the calculus might be worthwhile. Similarly, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is funding operations to scale up production of at least seven different possible vaccines, most if not all of which will not work. It is worth wasting the money to save the time.

Johnson's early response to coronavirus was characterised by the opposite: austerity had left the UK under-prepared, with its stockpiles neglected. The politics of the next phase of the crisis would seem to point one way: there's no such thing as overreaction. For a pandemic of this scale, though, the calculus is different: the costs of lockdown are absolutely huge, and increase dramatically as the duration of lockdown extends. Businesses can survive a few weeks – maybe a month or two – of severe disruption, with government support. But as we roll into month three, four, or even beyond, that gets far harder – and once some businesses fail, it can cause a cascade. Suppliers lose customers and fold themselves. Their workers can no longer afford to pay their bills or buy anything else. Once dominoes start to fall, they just keep dropping.

That requires the government to do everything in its power to pause the economy while it's in lockdown. But that runs against the politics and economics of almost everyone in Johnson's cabinet. Rishi Sunak is not a man who wants to be remembered for blowing up the UK's national debt, hugely expanding its welfare state, and effectively nationalising multiple industries.

Beyond that, Johnson's political base among Brexiteers – especially in the commentariat – are those most likely to chafe against continued coronavirus restrictions, and want the world to get back to 'normal'. Johnson has to balance very real costs and risks alongside balancing often contradictory political risks.

The cost of getting it wrong could be horrendous. The Spanish Flu of 1918 killed dramatically more people in its second peak than its first. If we relaxed restrictions too far and too fast, by the time we spotted it, the damage would continue to kill thousands for weeks into months – assuming a second lockdown could be agreed and enforced.

The practical way to ease lockdown is to wait until we are entirely ready to begin – having as low a base rate of coronavirus in the cases as possible, probably in the tens of thousands, not hundreds as estimated now.

It means having a very thoroughly tested track-and-trace infrastructure of a sort we have never had in the UK before (and for which the app won't even be 'technically' ready for two to three weeks). It means being the bearer of bad news for those wanting to get back to the pub. Getting coronavirus 'right' from here on out – securing the decent legacy Johnson wants and escaping the blame for earlier mistakes – means acting against almost all of his political instincts, resisting the easy headline, the short-termism, and the optimism. Throwing out the bluster. Paying attention to the details. Johnson needs to emerge from his near-death experience as a changed politician, for an extreme era. Believing that the supremely-confident, aristocratic old Etonian could really alter his approach to the world in his mid-fifties is quite the leap. If he cannot change, he may find that he has recovered from his illness only to engineer the demise of the political career he worked his whole life to secure. At least he would know which Greek hero that course most closely resembled.

BACK AT THE HELM: Prime minister Boris Johnson speaks in Downing Street as he returns to work
Photo: Getty Images

Mandrake

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Levido the man to watch at No 10

After assuming many of **Dominic Cummings**' responsibilities while he was laid low for 10 days with the coronavirus, **Isaac Levido** – the ambitious Australian election strategist who masterminded **Boris Johnson**'s victory – has signalled that he will be working at Downing Street for the long term.

"The original plan had been for Isaac to focus simply on sharpening up the government's coronavirus messaging, but he's now got his own office and it looks like he'll be here for the duration," one Whitehall insider tells Mandrake. "Whether this will be seen as a threat to the supremacy of Dominic as the PM's chief adviser remains to be seen, but he's a lot more easy to deal with than Dominic. Boris also came to depend upon him while Dominic was away."

As a declaration of intent, Levido has quit as a director of the market research and public opinion polling firm Fleetwood Strategy, which he set up in January with **Michael Brooks**, who also worked on Johnson's election campaign.

Cummings, *pictured*, would do well to be wary of Levido as he has form when it comes to usurping superiors. **Sir Lynton Crosby**, who was once Levido's boss and mentor, had run Johnson's successful London mayoral campaign in 2008 and was believed to have been close to the PM. Levido had no hesitation, however, in replacing him as the Tories' campaign manager after Crosby was seen to have bungled **Theresa May**'s 2017 campaign.

Last month, **Lord Heseltine** told me he expected Cummings to be gone "within a year" since he had allowed himself to "become the story". The Tory grandee made these comments before it was disclosed that Cummings had been attending meetings of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies. Significantly, perhaps, Cummings is still listed as a director of Dynamic Maps, an information technology consultancy that he set up in October 2017.

Golden silence

For once, there was not a single leak to the *Sunday Times* about **Michael Gove** over the weekend. No references at all to how he was outshining **Matt Hancock** in cabinet meetings, piously telling his colleagues that he was praying for the prime minister to get well, and not a word about how his fellow ministers were nevertheless lobbying hard for him to take over in the event he had a relapse.

I fear this may not necessarily mean that the leaker has mended his or her ways. As my man in the newsroom wearily points out, **Tim Shipman**, the paper's political editor whose byline always appears on these stories about Gove, happened to be away. He adds, incidentally, that the easy camaraderie that had previously existed between the *Sunday Times*' political team and the *Telegraph*'s has come to an abrupt end. His boss **Rupert Murdoch** wants Gove to take over from the lazy incumbent. **Sir David** and **Sir Frederick Barclay**, by contrast, want their man Boris Johnson to carry on regardless.

Show goes on

At times of personal and national trauma, theatres are traditionally places of solace. It's one of the many cruel ironies of our times that they are currently and necessarily all closed.

Still, theatre folk are by nature resilient and it's interesting that tickets to *Hamilton* are on sale from September 14, *The Book of Mormon* from September 7, and earlier this month the producers of *Hairspray* announced that **Michael Ball** would be appearing in their musical from September 1.

"All of these shows and others are at big venues, but their producers reckon that things will have resolved themselves over the next four months," one leading impresario tells me. "The number of seats already shown as taken on the online seating plans suggest a lot of theatre-goers share their optimism."

Jennifer's loss

Few ladies have emerged from an association with Boris Johnson smiling and **Jennifer Arcuri**, *pictured*, would appear to be no exception. The latest accounts from her web security company Hacker House show a deficit of £1,191,800 as of July 31, 2019. Johnson faced an official investigation after claims were made of favourable treatment being accorded to the former model during his period as mayor of London. Arcuri has been hurt that Johnson has been failing to return her calls, but she denies – along with Johnson – any wrong-doing.

Search on for scapegoats

MICHAEL WHITE ON THE ONSET OF SCURRILOUS STRATEGIES AROUND THE WORLD

When the *Daily Telegraph* reported that Boris Johnson was returning to work under growing pressure from Tory MPs, businesses and his – and Brexit's – financial backers to ease the lockdown, I was no position to dispute the paper's claim that social distancing discipline has been fraying. Living near a small park and a large road I had observed more crowds on both during another sunny weekend. But at the time the *Borisgraph* message popped up on my phone I was exploring 'OAP Hour' at Sainsbury's – my first such foray for weeks. It was much less busy than the park.

As we all learned when he spoke outside No.10 later that morning, Boris Mark II would probably have disapproved of my trip, even to a near-empty supermarket. Disciplined in tone, much healthier in his appearance, he even made a nod in the direction of consensus and greater transparency. Well, well. The world is definitely turned upside down when any of us can be reproached for self-indulgence by Mr Self Indulgence Mark I. Yet here he was rejecting the 'Unlock' lobby's plea. Next stop, the May 7 review. Will he wobble? It's the big test.

These are bizarre times and I would be delighted if Johnson's conduct from here on confirms the portly chancer's reformation. True, his pep talk framed his homecoming remarks to trumpet his and our "success" in keeping the NHS afloat, thereby ignoring the 20,000 hospital deaths – a 40,000 overall excess mortality rate, if care home deaths are included? He thereby offended many viewers. But turning crumbs of hope into a cake is what leaders have to do when people need cheering up.

★★★★★★★★★★

All the same, on the over-arching issue which draws us all to the *The New European* the news is persistently discouraging. Perpetual EU negotiator, Michel Barnier, expresses frustration at British obduracy and the lack of progress towards even a modest UK-EU future trade agreement. His concerns are echoed by Merkel allies in Berlin and elsewhere. Surely the Brits now understand the need for a post-Covid extension?

What they get back from London are blithe assurances from ministers that a deal by December 31 is still possible, reinforced by fist-waving jingoism from armchair negotiators in Fleet Street and persistent signs that Team Johnson is prepared to go over Lord Lawson's non-existent cliff if Brussels doesn't show more flexibility. Michael Gove repeated the message ("coronavirus should concentrate the minds") in an online session with MPs on Monday. There "needs to be some political movement on the EU side," is No.10's official line.

Last week the *Times* carried a letter signed by the usual mixture of great and good, academics and oncologists, plus some familiar sign-anything Brexit diehards, insisting the negotiators are "perfectly capable of negotiating as planned". If more time is needed (shurely not - Ed),"there are many ways of providing it without a formal extension". A formal delay would tie us into EU law ("present and future"), into billions of extra budget costs, prolong business uncertainty (sic) and "sabotage vital negotiations" for trade agreements with expanding markets in the great world beyond. Above all, Britain might be sucked into "potentially astronomical bailout costs in case of a Eurozone meltdown".

Not all the signatories are conspicuously qualified to make such sweeping judgements – I make the point gently – but faith can work miracles on the intellect. They may be right to fear a Eurozone meltdown, I fear one myself looking at the rising cost of servicing shaky Italian debt – 2.6% more than German rates. At last week's fourth e-summit EU leaders again failed to resolve the loans-or-grants dispute and resolve north-south tension. Mediterranean tourism ministers – 10% of EU GDP – are also frustrated by the lack of agreed rules for travel, hotels and restaurants. A 'corridor' through France anyone ?

But I do not share the *Times* letter-writers' apparent belief that a Eurozone meltdown would not be our problem too or their refusal to consider that the next meltdown might be sterling's. Rishi Sunak is having to write ever-bigger cheques to keep the economy on its financial ventilator and must borrow to do so – much of it electronic money 'printed' by the Bank of England. Confidence walks a tightrope.

★★★★★★★★★★

As for those expanding global markets, the *Times* letter implies a Trumpian view that summer sunshine – perhaps with a shot of disinfectant for luck – will eliminate the risk of a second pandemic wave which both history and medicine tell us to expect. Possibly a third and fourth before Oxford vaccine (or someone else's) arrives. Good luck with that one, Dame Helena Morrissey, Graham Gudgin, Ruth Lea, Andrew Roberts and you professors of theoretical chemistry and retired top spooks (I mean you, Richard Dearlove) who signed the letter.

Actually, it's worse than that. As I was writing here last week, the gung ho attitudes that led this country to its late and ill-prepared response to the emerging Covid-19 crisis closely resembles the insouciance displayed towards Brexit and its predictable ill-effects. Brexit stalwarts may already be calculating that the pandemic will provide them with a fresh alibi if 'sovereignty' falls short of a world-beating formula. Not if Team Boris is seen to have fumbled the Covid challenge, it won't. "Worst death rate in Europe" would be hard to spin away.

> **"The gung ho attitudes that led this country to its late and ill-prepared response to the emerging Covid-19 crisis closely resembles the insouciance displayed towards Brexit and its predictable ill-effects**

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Look what happened to John Major after an economic storm sunk his reputation (1992) when sterling was forced out of the embryo-euro, or Gordon Brown after the bank crash of 2007-9, much more unfairly because he and Alistair Darling responded boldly to the financial crisis. UN and G20 responses to CV-19 are woeful in comparison to the 2009 response or to the ebola outbreak in West Africa, brilliantly managed by the international community in 2014-16.

Blame Donald Trump. Not content with exposing the US as a half-failed state in its abject response to pandemic, the Dettol-swigging nativist does his best to wreck global cooperation too. US and Chinese scientists are working together on a cure despite him. Fake and politicised science, naked conflicts of interest, outright cronyism and profiteering, the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, embodies all the accumulated failings of the American system since its Pyrric victory in the Cold War: 9/11, Iraq, Wall St and now Covid-19, all mishandled. No wonder voters' trust has evaporated.

Are we much better? Yes and no. The contrast between No.10's daily Covid briefings, dull but decent, and Trump's embarrassingly self-serving-self-defeating election circus – briefly suspended after last Thursday's disinfection disaster – is reassuring. But there are too many pale echoes to take much comfort unless the New Boris mends his ways. The row over Dominic Cummings and data cruncher, Ben ("Brexit") Warner's presence at SAGE sessions is a bad sign and scientists who loyally pretend it doesn't matter do themselves – and the national interest – no favours.

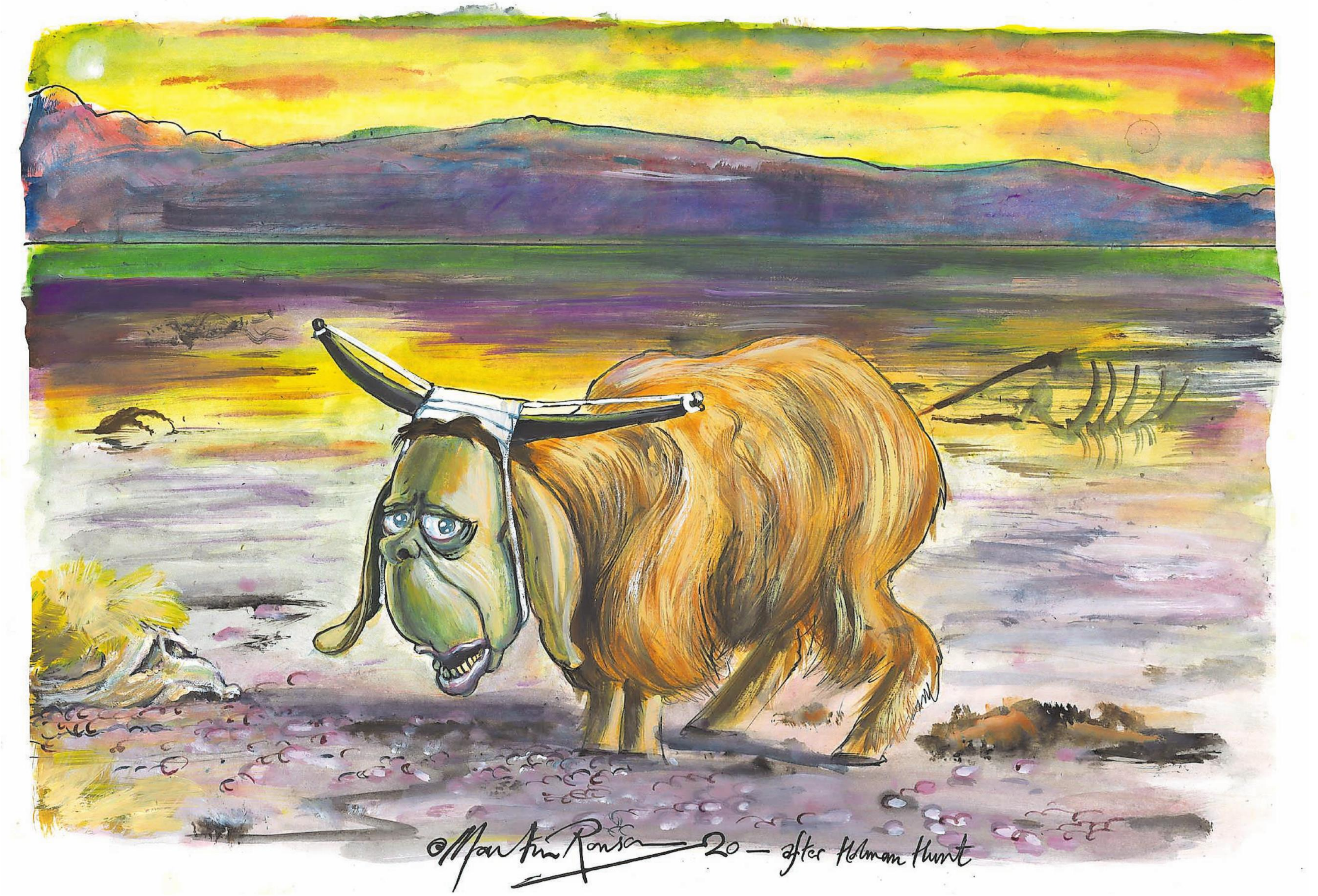
★★★★★★★★★★

On the upside, two national institutions much attacked by ideological or cynical Tories, the NHS and the BBC, have both shown their worth when the Covid chips were down, and refurbished their credentials as a source of comfort and reliable information – not to mention life-saving heroics on the ward. Ethnic minority staff, sounding oh-so-British in their in their old-fashioned stoicism and commitment, have been central to the drama and Thursday night applause. In his belated search for unity of purpose the pragmatic opportunist in Johnson is even courting the marginalised CBI and TUC.

Much good can come of this. It does not mean that Trump-style intimidation and a politicised civil service can't happen here too. In a different, diffident kind of British way, it is happening. Not just via Cummings's high-handed sacking of special advisers (one of several Johnson scandals kicked deep into the Covid long grass), but in a dramatic and highly visible way only last week. Have we already forgotten that after the head of the Foreign Office, Sir Simon McDonald, said the UK's decision not to join an EU ventilator purchase scheme, was "political", he was leaned on hard to retract?

The crucial sentence in McDonald's retraction statement was: "Ministers were not briefed *by our mission in Brussels* about the scheme and a political decision was not taken on whether or not to participate." As Martin Kettle pointed out in a shrewd *Guardian* column, the implication is clear, but obfuscated. The EU mission did brief Whitehall colleagues in the FCO and Department of Health. They in turn briefed ministers. The ministers did not take a "political decision" not to join the EU scheme in February – who needs Brussels, eh ? – because they took a political non-decision and left the matter pending.

Only much later did Matt Hancock realise the value of EU cooperation and join such schemes. Not very important in itself – medical advice changed on ventilator use – the incident has all the hallmarks of casual Johnsonian arrogance. The World King wasn't interested in Covid-19, though he certainly is now. As he scrambles to hide past mistakes and get ahead of the curve, will Boris be tempted to scapegoat ex-Remainer and leadership challenger Hancock for his own unfulfilled promises on PPE (a pair of gloves don't count as two items, minister) or – most conspicuously – on those 100,000 daily tests?


©Martin Rowson 20 – after Holman Hunt

Everyone knows statistics can be massaged, as Tuesday's care home deaths shocker from the ONS – now one third of the total – confirmed. I have long assumed that home and care home deaths have been kept out of the daily mortality total in part because ministers can better avoid the "1,000 deaths a day" headlines. Excess mortality – death from other causes in consequence of the emergency – have also been kept vague. They did the same in 1916 about casualties on the Somme – 20,000 British dead and 40,000 wounded on the first day, by the way – for reasons we can readily understand. But if voters think they're being misled for no good reason, trust atrophies.

* * *

So Hancock is vulnerable and being briefed against as "Scapecock" by some who should know better. Yet of all Johnson's ministers – apart from Sunak – he is the one who has shown more drive and energy, more emotional commitment too. You sense he cares, not just about himself. Political calculation, evasion and sidestepping, are all visible, but faintly in the background. No Trump-like grandstanding for re-election.

In Keir Starmer and his durable health spokesman, Jon Ashworth, Team Johnson knows it now has serious opponents to hold it to account. "Overall Starmer's shadow cabinet is more impressive than the cabinet," says a friend with 40 years on Whitehall's inside track.

Eager-beaver Hancock has been given cover by Jeremy Hunt, constructively critical and always the gent; also by Andy Burnham, Labour's last occupant of the health hot seat and a veteran of epidemic planning. Johnson would be wise to discount stories of great battles between Sunak and Hancock – he has a PPE degree and worked at the Bank of England – over the scale and pace of the exit strategy to ease the economic damage.

I just wish all those Oxford PPE graduates who feature in every modern government were better at procuring PPE when the NHS needs it.

But the pair of them get the dilemma: they know that premature relaxation will only make the second wave more devastating and demoralising. Lost jobs, exams, summer holidays, tax receipts, the cost is grim and long-lasting, but so are the alternatives. Tardy Britain at least has the undeserved advantage of watching the experiments in re-opening being launched around the world, from Belgium to New Zealand via Vietnam (which has done very well). Half-opening offices, pubs and cinemas with social distancing will be a logistical challenge. We can meet it.

One consistent lesson we will all have to absorb – as Bonnie Greer pointed out in last week's *TNE* – is that women leaders seem to have a better Covid record than the chaps. That emerging factor may boost Joe Biden's search for a woman to run as his vice-presidential nominee and (at 77) his likely successor, a development which may usefully goad the scapegoat-merchant in the White House to more misogynistic abuse.

It could also encourage more creative EU thinking in response to the Covid crisis and the Brexit talks, "political movement," as Johnson puts it. Why so? Because in chancellor Merkel, Ursula von der Leyen (German Commission president) and France's Christine Lagarde, at the head of the ECB, women now play central roles in Europe's future. They are more central to the current loans-or-grants battle over the Covid recovery plan than Emmanuel Macron, who has sided with the losing Latin camp.

* * *

Can they do enough to prevent a Eurozone recession turning into a deflationary depression that could derail the project? Can they and competition commissioner, Denmark's formidable Margrethe Vestager, stand up to China effectively in ways that protect European industries and standards from Beijing's predatory strategy – without a Trump-ish trade war. This week's admission that Brussels watered down a report confirming that the Chinese engaged in Covid black propaganda – because of Chinese pressure – was not encouraging. Not that Global Britain does much better. Nor does the White House despite the scapegoating bluster.

Michael Barnier says London is "not engaging seriously" on last year's political commitment to a regulatory "level playing field", to existing levels of access to UK waters for EU fishing fleets and an over-arching trade agreement, complete with a supervisory role for the ECJ. Johnson's negotiator, David Frost, counters that he wants a trade deal like Canada's and a fishing deal like Norway's, with its annual quota negotiation.

Oh yes, he also wants full tariff-free access for UK goods. No, shout UK ministers, "WE'RE NOT BLUFFING".

Both sides are pushing their luck and can poke holes in each other's negotiating arguments.

But both sides will suffer badly from failure at the June summit or in the cliffhanging months which follow, which are likely to be played out against a background of continuing Covid drama and death, economic distress and encircling opportunism from Russia as well as China. Barnier's inflexibility wore down Britain in the withdrawal talks. Unless Johnson's near-death personal experience has made him as cautious as he now sounds on the lockdown, it may not work so well in the perilously changed circumstances we all face.

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WARTIME ANALOGY: Workers assemble Spitfires at an aircraft factory, 1941. David Edgerton says the Covid-19 epidemic hasn't prompted a coherent industrial strategy

Photo: Getty Images

Where Brexit and Covid collide

Historian DAVID EDGERTON on the cynical fantasies about innovation and exceptionalism providing a common strand

The government's response to Covid-19 and Brexit are intimately connected. Recognising this is vital to understanding the politics of both. Indeed as the trade expert David Henig has noted, we will know that the UK is really serious about Covid-19 at the moment in which is prepared to say that a Brexit extension is needed. That moment has not yet come, indeed it has been ruled out.

On the face of it there is a very great difference between the two policies. In the case of Brexit the government has consistently rejected the advice of economists, including its own.

In the case of Covid-19 it constantly reiterates that it is "following the science". But there is an underlying connection which is important. Brexiteer arguments are centred on fantasies about British scientific and inventive genius. The government has sought to address Covid-19 at least in part on this deluded basis.

At the beginning, Boris Johnson stood behind "the science" to justify a UK-only policy of 'delay' of the Covid-19 virus. This involved minimal intervention in what Johnson took to reminding us are the "freedom-loving" proclivities of the "British people". Too late, what looked like a cunning plan to exemplify the virtues of the British way collapsed utterly.

The UK is now, broadly-speaking, following Europe and much of the rest of the world. "Following the science" now sounds like a way of not answering legitimate questions.

But when it comes to ventilators, a Brexiteer innovation-fixated logic applies. The current crisis has been an opportunity to illustrate the argument that the UK was a powerful innovation nation that could do very well without the EU.

The government launched a programme, the details of which are still murky, to create new emergency ventilators. First off the blocks in the PR blitz was the Brexiteer Sir James Dyson, who was teaming up with another Brexiteer capitalist, Lord Bamford of JCB, to make many thousands of the devices.

This, it turned out was just one of many projects to design new ventilators, and to modify others for mass production. There were lots of allusions to the Second World War, as if Spitfires had been conjured out of thin air in the heat generated by patriotic enthusiasm.

It is telling too that the government decided not to take part in the EU ventilator procurement programme. This had to be a British programme for PR purposes, even though many of the companies making the components in the UK are European, like Siemens, Airbus, Thales…

That wartime analogy was deeply misleading – the UK was a world leader in aircraft before the Battle of Britain. It had been making Spitfires since the late 1930s, and had huge long-planned specialist factories making them.

What is clear is that we are not in 1940. The UK is not a world leader in ventilator manufacture, far from it. Furthermore, the NHS (and this is a scandal) has been under-supplied with them. The high-end ventilators the NHS now needs will and are coming from abroad.

It looks as if the British emergency ventilators will generally be low-end ones, and one at least has already been rejected. The ones that seem to be going into production are based on simple machines long in production in the UK.

Indeed, there may be a wartime analogy which could become pertinent. Churchill did attempt to conjure up new weapons in a hurry in the face of expert advice. They included anti-aircraft rockets, spigot mortars, and indeed a trench-cutting machine. They were universally late, did not work well or at all, and represented a huge waste of resources.

We should not be fooled into believing that there is a coherent industrial strategy emerging out of the epidemic, a determined move to national self-supply.

For if there were the government would not be throwing manufacturing in Britain to the winds, as its Brexit plans certainly would. For they involve the breaking up of the regulatory and customs market in which they exist, and furthermore, would open the British market not only to European producers, but those from all over the world. That is what being a global champion of free trade means.

What we need to understand is the centrality of a mythical picture of British innovation to Brexit. Brexiteer arguments for a hard Brexit hinge on the UK's supposed leadership in creativity and innovation, which was just waiting to be unleashed.

Dominic Cummings got his £800 million in the budget for a UK version of the US Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). The wonderful thing about invoking 'science' is that it suggests action, drive, modernity.

Yet what Johnson and other Brexiteers have rediscovered was a great British liberal tradition of making a lot of noise about science in order to cover up deliberate inaction, in the face of demands for a national and imperial strategy for agriculture and industry.

Before the Great War, faced with calls from the Tories for tariffs on imports, not least food, which he vehemently opposed, David Lloyd George funded agricultural research to help farmers instead.

Of course any help they might receive would be years in the future and trivial by comparison with tariffs. Similarly, in the 1920s, the government resisted protection and imperial preference by creating an Empire Marketing Board, one of whose major functions was research. It had minor impact, as intended, and was wound up the moment tariffs came in the 1930s.

The strategy has been in action for a while. After 2008 there was much talk about the 'march of the makers', and the 'northern powerhouse'. One of the very few initiatives was the support, with £50m, of the Graphene Institute. Graphene, made by two Manchester University scientists, was seen as a wonder material, which would transform the fortunes of the university, its region and the whole country. It was trumpeted the key to a vibrant new future. It has not arrived. Sums like £50m can buy a lot of media coverage; they cannot buy you a real industrial strategy. Innovation capacity in batteries has been a favourite for some years. Yet there is no significant British battery industry, nor the prospect of one. Electric cars, and batteries for them, are very much more advanced in Europe, in China and in Japan. One cannot magic an industry out of thin air, whether high-end ventilators or batteries, but by referencing innovation one can pretend, for a while.

And that is where the politics of Covid-19, and Brexit, are stuck, in cynical fantasies about innovation.

■ David Edgerton teaches at King's College London, where he is Hans Rausing professor of the history of science and technology and professor of modern British history; this article also appears at his blog, www.davidedgerton.org

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28 weeks later

We have lived through so much cultural change so quickly, it is hard to project forward more than a day or two. Where will we be by the end of the year – reverting to type, or changed utterly? HANNAH JANE PARKINSON has been scanning the horizon

Twenty-eight days later? Try 28 weeks later. I don't know if any of you had plans pencilled in for October 5 – birthday parties if you are Imran Khan or Kate Winslet – but I wouldn't bet on them being relevant. You see, it could go either way.

As scientists have repeatedly levelled with us; this new way of living doesn't fully end until a proven vaccination has been found. Most estimates are around 18 months (78 weeks later…) for one to be developed successfully. A team at the University of Oxford, however, gives an estimate of September at the earliest. Whether that vaccine or the tens of others in development come off, in what would be an extremely rapid timeframe, will alter entirely the end of 2020.

Come the autumn, then, will we still be in full lockdown? Or will we have been let out in stages? The young, unleashed like puppies bolting from an opened car door. Licking each other a lot, no doubt. Will some of us be walking around with the "immunity passports", mooted by Matt Hancock? Certificates which seem both to make sense and be uncomfortably reminiscent of authoritarian states.

Remember, the UK is a nation which rejected ID cards and has an intolerance for the types of surveillance measures that bolstered China and South Korea's coronavirus response. If the youth are let out early, will this open up further generational tensions, after a sort of armistice in quarantine?

If lockdown has ended in October, will people without gardens come blinking back into the light with the pallor of Elizabeth I? Will those with gardens have transformed into horticultural masters via YouTube tutorials and plenty of practice, now looking to enter the 2021 Chelsea Flower Show. And will medals be awarded for Skills Learned During Lockdown?

There will be three new corona-inspired types of physique: those who bought home-gym equipment and weights before every online retailer sold out of them, emerging with triangular shaped upper bodies; those who ate chocolate for two-thirds of meals (perfectly understandable) and didn't give a toss; and those who were hit badly by Covid-19 and are still recuperating after the brutal ravaging of their insides.

Wait, four physiques: those who have been ill for reasons unrelated to coronavirus, whose treatment has been delayed for weeks and weeks, despite government assertions that the NHS has been "open for business as usual". Because it isn't, and it won't have been.

What, in particular, of the bodies that used to entertain us? No, not those ones. Although, shout out to all my fellow single quarantiners; it's been a while. I mean the feet that kick balls; the arms that throw javelins; the hands that grip rackets. In one of the most extreme examples of hero to zero, I went from cocky Liverpool FC fan just waiting, filing nails, for an inevitable league win, to staring down the barrel of a scrapped season.

It won't be scrapped, for numerous reasons. I am confident it will be finished. But how will a socially-distanced open-top bus parade work? Will games be played behind closed doors? What if an unassailable lead dissolves in the face of such upheaval? And will the sports sections of newspapers have survived to the end of the year to tell the tale? Some news outlets, after pleading in vain for subscribers and purchases of print copies, or donations, will fold. And then afterwards, people will talk of what a great loss they are.

Will the news just consist of reporters asking the home secretary Priti Patel questions she can't answer, via an internet connection dodgier than a man selling watches from the inside of a coat? Will our health system now be funded solely by people texting in to give fivers and 99-year-old army veterans walking around their gardens? Will a lapel badge have proved to be just as effective as PPE? More as we get it.

Maybe we enter a dystopia, in which Patel becomes prime minister, and plasters The Smirk across billboards nationwide. The smirk will follow us like the eyes of the Mona Lisa. No, but really: will Johnson still be PM in October? After thousands of deaths, even with the unprecedented nature of the virus factored in, how will the government's strategy look? Has parliament become fully digital and, if so, will Rees-Mogg have to artfully position his laptop atop a pile of thick history books so that his rude, performative reclining is in shot?

Will Keir Starmer's stockpile of sculpting gel have run out after issues with supply lines? By October, I fully expect the rats to have taken over the sulphuric detritus of the Houses of Parliament; a situation a mere whisker away before all of this. Stanley Johnson, father of the prime minister, will walk, uninvited, into every home in the land to assert his opinion on… literally anything. This whether or not the lockdown is lifted.

Buried grief and layered cakes of delayed celebration may finally be allowed an outlet. Quasi-funerals take place, real ceremonies having been denied to the thousands of dead. Goodbyes, not permitted for families of dying loved ones, including 13-year-olds, will be said in emotional gatherings.

Weddings will take place again; at least for couples that haven't split up in the meantime. Divorce lawyers will crack their knuckles and lick their lips at the prospect of so much work ("until lockdown do us part"). *Vice* will have run at least three "I had sex with my step-sister during lockdown and here's what happened" pieces.

NHS staff, traumatised from the frontline, will need a lot of therapy, and not just the banging of pans, as genuinely moving as that was (and I say that as a cynic). Hairdressers will account for 60% of economic growth. We will have to readjust to the feel of denim on the skin. Some of us will organise fire-pits to burn all sweatpants; others will never wear anything but sweatpants again. Mobile phone signal and data connections continually drop out as the telecom towers, vandalised by conspiracy theorists, are slowly rebuilt. But we will, fingers crossed, be meeting face to face. Touch will be back in town (I cannot wait).

Emotions will remain a vortex. The ostensible great coronavirus equalling will be exposed as a lie, obvious to anyone who looked closely enough. Furloughed staff return to work. Those made unemployed emerge after months of hardship, choosing daily between food and fuel. Others, more fortunate, list the books they have read. Teenage boys talk of Don DeLillo and nothing else. Something called *Animal Crossing* is named Oxford Dictionary's word of the year, even though it is two words. We let it slide. Perhaps, I hope, humanity triumphs over ideology. Perhaps immigrants, frontline workers, those in insecure jobs who have proved invaluable; who have fed us; looked after us; saved our lives; cared for us; kept our spirits up, will be given their due. Perhaps the escaped goats of Llandudno will lead the way.

After the courts reopen, the nation follows the legal appeal of Charles and Diana Ingram, whose story was at the heart of *Quiz*, the show we all binged early on in the New Era. Which seems so long ago. Twenty-eight weeks on we might – just might – be nearer to knowing the answers to many, many questions.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: Clockwise from left, Mohamed Salah celebrates a goal with Liverpool team-mate Sadio Mane; Matthew Macfadyen and Sian Clifford as Charles and Diana Ingram in *Quiz*; mountain goats roam the streets of Llandudno and home secretary Priti Patel

Photos: Getty Images

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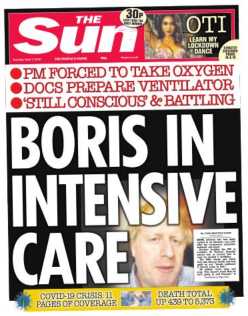
THE Sun
30p
OTI LEARN MY LOCKDOWN DANCE
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No strategy for leaving lockdown until Johnson returns, ministers admit

THE BIG LOCKDOWN DEBATE
Jeremy WARNER vs Ambrose EVANS-PRITCHARD
Plus Allison PEARSON and Philip JOHNSTON on where we go next
The Daily Telegraph
NHS workers given flawed virus tests
Human trials for vaccine to start as ministers aim to lead world
Worst may be over since we hit peak on April 8, say scientists

This is not the media's finest hour..

But journalists remain key workers

Too critical for some, not critical enough for others, the press has infuriated and irritated many during this crisis, says LIZ GERARD

Let's hear it for the key workers keeping the country going. Obviously the doctors, nurses and care staff, but also the delivery drivers, supermarket workers, teachers, police, probation officers and journalists.

Journalists? Yes, journalists are officially essential workers – as in any functioning society. Indeed, the editor-in-chief of the trade paper *Press Gazette*, has gone so far as to say we are the unsung heroes of the pandemic.

Unsung certainly. For just at the moment we are most needed, we seem also to have reached a low point in the public's estimation. One YouGov survey for *Sky News* found that only 17% of respondents trusted newspaper journalists, with broadcasters faring little better at 24%.

It's the same mentality that says "all politicians are liars/in it for themselves" when patently most are neither. While "never trust a journalist" might hold good if the red-topper on the doorstep is asking you to share your bedroom secrets, it surely doesn't when a specialist is explaining in simple language how the coronavirus replicates itself.

Or asking difficult questions about how the government, whose primary task is to keep its citizens safe, proposes to do just that when Covid-19 is killing thousands around the world every day; or how it plans to balance lives against livelihoods after weeks of lockdown.

Some have taken the constant war metaphors so much to heart that they think such questions unseemly. Notably the Scottish political blogger Effie Deans, who wrote that journalists had missed the public mood and should stop obsessing about things such as PPE and how other countries are doing. "We don't want blame, we don't want argument as if this were a general election," she wrote.

"We want a contribution to the national effort to get us out of this crisis. We want optimism and faith in our country." Belief, not political point-scoring, was what was needed. Keeping up morale – "which matters so much to armies" – was essential because "morale can cause miracles, not merely in battle, but in illness".

That post has been read by more than half a million people – the sort of readership most mainstream journalists can only dream of. And a lot of those readers were saying "hear, hear". Journalists are well aware of the need to keep people's spirits up, to entertain readers as well as inform them.

That's why newspapers are puffing the extra puzzles they are publishing, running features on the whacky ways friends are socialising virtually. But it's not their job to follow the "public mood". It is their job to tell people what they need to know.

Apart from anything else, the "public mood" is unquantifiable – beyond the obvious that we could all do with some cheerful news and that we can all rejoice in Captain Tom.

But, to put it harshly, he is just a charming diversion in this horror. On the central issue there is no "public mood". Some think the government has messed up; some think it was slow off the mark, but is getting better; some think it's doing ok; some think it's done ok so far, but needs to change tack.

This range of opinion is well reflected by journalists as diverse as Toby Young and Allison Pearson, Paul Mason and Marina Hyde, and dozens more politically in between. Many (particularly Remainers) are aghast to find that Piers Morgan now speaks for them.

That YouGov survey reported that 64% of people distrusted broadcast journalists, yet another by Ofcom found that more than 80% of people get their news from broadcasters, with between 75% and 83% trusting the various networks.

A similar paradox applies to the press. YouGov says that 72% of its respondents distrust newspaper journalists and the UK press has for years (by some margin) been the least trusted in Europe.

Yet, according to Ofcom, nearly half of us still turn to them for news. And while circulations are slumping, website traffic to newspaper websites is soaring.

There is a real chance that this virus could kill off daily papers as we know them. Revenue is vanishing along with advertisers with nowhere to sell and shoppers with nowhere to buy.

Hence the much longer than usual appeal for contributions at the end of the *Guardian*'s online articles. And the concerted Twitter appeals from *Sun* journalists begging people to #buyapaper – like this one from the Sunday edition's political editor David Wooding: "The frothy coffee shops might be closed but our newspapers are still available – providing trusted information, not myths, for millions of people during the crisis. For less than that cup of cappuccino. Do your bit."

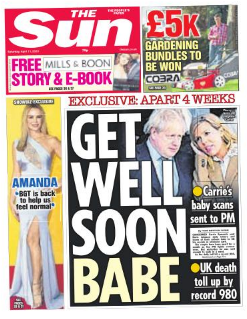
Over a 12-hour period four of the paper's top journalists posted similar tweets, three mentioning the price of a coffee and all using the phrase "trusted information".

It's not hard to imagine the response they got when you consider not only the general lack of trust in the press, but also the fact that the *Sun*'s most ignominious moment came with a front page headlined "The truth".

Those tweets were sent as Boris

OBSERVERS: The BBC's Fergus Walsh and a TV crew visit a coronavirus ward

Photo: BBC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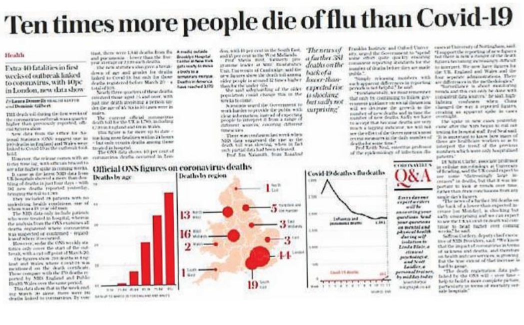
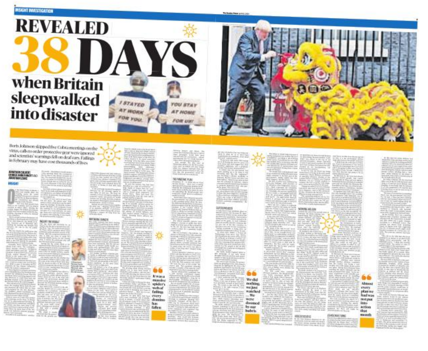

Ten times more people die of flu than Covid-19
Official ONS figures on coronavirus deaths
Q&A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Thank you
Nation applauds NHS from doorsteps and balconies
Farewell Eddie Large
10 virus facts that your GP wants you to know
Corbyn's legacy
Loaf in the time of corona

Johnson was admitted to hospital. By any measure, a prime minister in intensive care is a big story; when he has been laid low by the very virus he is "battling" on behalf of the country, it becomes enormous. For the next week – apart from clapping Thursday – Johnson's condition dominated the *Sun*'s front pages, including one where it told readers to pray for him.

This at a time when health workers were using binbags because they had no protective gowns, procurement and testing rows were raging, the cabinet was at odds over lockdown – and the death toll was climbing towards a thousand a day.

Over the course of that week, the total number of Covid deaths in hospitals doubled to 10,000, but this was subordinate to the prime minister watching *Withnail and I*, worthy of note only at the foot of the page, sometimes in a starburst-style "virus". Was this the kind of positivity that Effie Deans was looking for? More in tune with the "public mood"?

That "virus" death toll, reminiscent of midsummer "phew, what a scorcher!" temperature sunbursts, had been a feature of the paper's Covid coverage almost from the word go, reaching peak bad taste last week when the main headline was "Pubs shut till Xmas", overlaid on a picture pint of beer. The "virus" sat beside the word "till", proclaiming "596 dead. See page 4". It hasn't appeared since. Maybe the appalled reaction made the editor have a rethink. Maybe she adjusted to the public mood.

There have been missteps along the way. There has been some rank journalism, both in the partisan pro-Boris propaganda and in the stubborn refusal by his opponents to accept that he has done anything right at any point. The *Telegraph*'s "Ten times more people die of flu than Covid-19" was a real shocker, comparing one week's covid deaths early in the epidemic with those for all respiratory deaths, including flu, pneumonia, asthma, bronchitis etc, etc, not to mention undiagnosed coronavirus.

The daily press conferences are exasperating and have come under attack from viewers and journalists alike. The same people asking long-winded questions, the lack of proper follow-ups, the absence of specialists from outside of the lobby caucus.

Press conferences do tend to be messy affairs; it's just that the public don't usually see them. When they work well, journalists pull together like a tag team, picking up lines from the previous questioner, leading to greater enlightenment for all.

More often, as we have seen in Downing Street, everyone has the one point they want to raise and they're going to raise it, come what may. Then everyone loses, apart from the minister let off the hook.

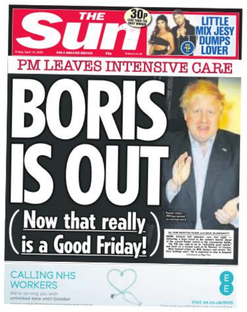
But there has also been some great journalism – and great dedication by journalists. Do you remember the last day you didn't see Hugh Pym or Fergus Walsh onscreen? Would the "herd immunity" strategy have been abandoned if Robert Peston hadn't reported it? Would PPE and testing failings have been addressed without journalistic pressure? Who highlighted the care home and domestic abuse concerns?

Look at the 'explainers' on every platform: websites, newspapers, periodicals, specialist press, radio, television, podcasts – and, yes, social media.

Look at the community initiatives from local newspaper publishers. Look at the human stories about families everywhere in mourning. Look at the accounts by Dominic Minghella and Roger Boyes of their experiences as Covid patients.

These are the people Dominic Ponsford, editor-in-chief of *Press Gazette*, means when he talks about unsung heroes. He wants to showcase "excellence" in journalism and has invited nominations from anyone interested. Naturally, the national press were there at the first whiff of a plaudit, but to be frank, this hasn't been their finest hour. Let's hope lower-profile journalists from a more diverse background get the recognition they deserve.

Maybe Effie Deans could put herself forward for the next round. Because what she's doing, agree with her or not, is journalism. Which makes her a journalist. And, in a democracy, journalists are key workers.


The Sun
30p
Little Mix Jesy dumps lover
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(Now that really is a Good Friday!)
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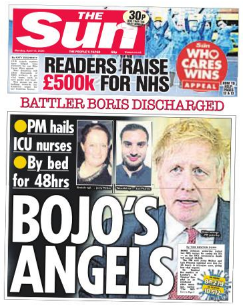
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92 new outbreaks in 24 hours ++ 2,200 homes now stricken ++ 30 deaths over Easter ++ Ex-minister says elderly abandoned 'like lambs to slaughter'
Harry finding life abroad 'challenging', says friend

Passing the Piers review

The *Good Morning Britain* host has been a force for good during the virus crisis, says ANTHONY CLAVANE

If Ian Hislop is short of an idea for *Private Eye*'s next 'Apology' column he should bury the hatchet with his arch-enemy Piers Morgan and feature the *Good Morning Britain* host.

The spoof piece might explain that, in recent years, all self-respecting progressives have given the impression that Morgan was a smug, name-dropping, egotistical, arrogant buffoon whose over-hyped TV rants pandered to the prejudices of the more bigoted sections of Middle England.

They now realise, however, in the light of his recent interviews, articles and Tweets, that nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, they are happy to accept that he is the People's Piers, the newly-anointed voice of the nation, a champion of transparency, a brilliant reporter who robustly holds the powerful to account.

Hislop is unlikely to end his long-running feud with the former *Daily Mirror* editor any time soon. The *Have I Got News For You* star is one of the many enemies Morgan has made during his long journey from local newspaper trainee to one of the country's most influential journalists.

This is a shame as the rivals now find themselves in the same camp, both seeing it as their duty to bring to the public's attention the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

Morgan's live interrogations of ministers on *GMB*, the breakfast programme he co-hosts with Susanna Reid, have become must-see TV.

His spats with various interviewees have, since he joined the show five years ago, constantly boosted audience share rating – "cultivating the persona," noted *Vice* magazine, "that makes him a one-man clickbait machine" – so, in one way, this is nothing new.

What is new, however, is his appeal to the kind of self-respecting progressive who, up until recently, signed petitions calling for him to be cancelled.

In the last few weeks he has become an unlikely poster-boy for the *Guardian*. "Say what you like about Piers Morgan," wrote the newspaper's Russell Cunningham in a love letter to the 55-year-old Arsenal fan, "the man's got balls". An op-ed hailed him as the "voice of reason". Columnist John Crace saluted him as "the everyman who isn't afraid to use what power he has to call out bulls**t and incompetence for what it is."

This is a newspaper whose readers Morgan clearly had in mind when he ridiculed, on a pinned Tweet, all "whiny PC-crazed snowflake imbeciles".

The *Independent* called Morgan a hero. And *Line of Duty* writer Jed Mercurio has praised his interrogation skills; maybe he will join Ted Hastings at AC-12 in the next series?

At the same time, calling out successive ministers' bulls**t and incompetence – or, to put it another way, asking them difficult questions – has turned the Boris fandom against him.

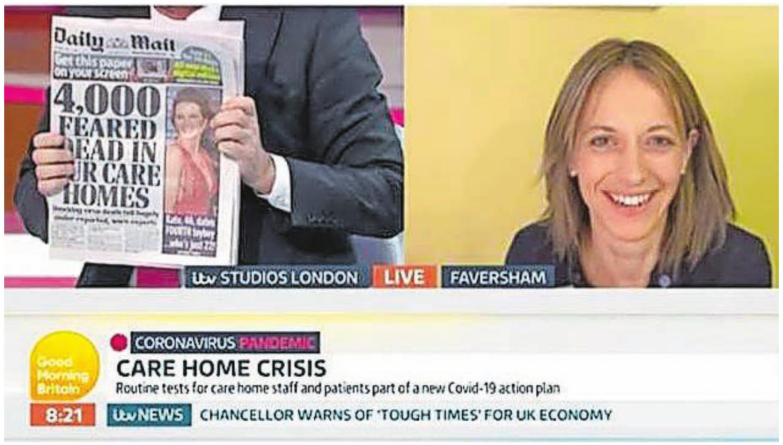
Tory MP Daniel Kawczynski dismissed Morgan's skilled interrogations as "pantomime bluster". Populist website *Politicalite* denounced him as a "left-wing media luvvie who has repeatedly misjudged the mood of the nation". And blogger *Guido Fawkes* first accused him of hypocrisy for attending an Arsenal game in early March – despite attacking the government for allowing the Cheltenham Festival to go ahead – and then gleefully reported that *GMB*'s viewing figures had apparently collapsed from 1.23 million to 704,300 – "fake news," says Morgan. Even Lord Sugar has waded in, chiding him for "terrible reporting".

There may be some truth in some of the criticism. As befits a controversialist

▶ Turn to page 14

itv NEWS
Good Morning Britain
6:03
itv NEWS
BORIS JOHNSON IS BACK TO WORK TODAY AFTER CORONAVIRUS BATTLE

MUST-SEE TV: Piers Morgan's criticism of the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic has turned the Boris fandom against him Photo: ITV


Daily Mail
Get this paper on your screen
4,000 FEARED DEAD IN OUR CARE HOMES
STUDIOS LONDON
LIVE
FAVERSHAM
Good Morning Britain
CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
CARE HOME CRISIS
Routine tests for care home staff and patients part of a new Covid-19 action plan
8:21
NEWS
CHANCELLOR WARNS OF 'TOUGH TIMES' FOR UK ECONOMY

BLAST: Cabinet minister Helen Whately was accused of laughing by Piers Morgan during a car-crash interview on *Good Morning Britain* Photo: ITV

▶ From page 13

with 7.4 million followers, he thrives on Twitter storms and is always delighted to be part of the story.

He is quite clearly an attention-seeker and often fails to allow interviewees enough time to answer his questions. Going to the Arsenal match was obviously a mistake.

And he certainly carries a lot of baggage. The critic AA Gill once joked he had "learned human as a second language". Since taking charge of the *News of the World* at just 28 – becoming the youngest national newspaper editor in 50 years – he has annoyed, offended and appalled many people.

Since the 2016 EU referendum, even though he voted to Remain, he has often had Europhiles – indeed anyone who has dared to criticise Brexit – in his sights.

At a notorious British Press Awards ceremony, Jeremy Clarkson punched him three times in response to the *Mirror* publishing a picture of the then *Top Gear* presenter with a woman who wasn't his wife. He was relentlessly mocked by Hislop on an episode of *Have I Got News For You* – and then vowed to avenge this humiliation by exposing the *Private Eye* editor's personal life.

The lowest point was his 2004 sacking at the *Mirror* for publishing allegedly hoax pictures of British troops abusing Iraqi prisoners.

But Sugar couldn't be more wrong about Morgan's reporting skills. The *GMB* presenter's journalism has, during the pandemic, been exemplary, his morning grillings an antidote to the bland, tedious, 5pm press briefings.

He was right to dress down ministers for being slow to move at the start of the crisis. He was right to tell Northern Ireland secretary Brandon Lewis it was "an absolute disgrace" that few care home workers had been tested.

He and Reid have been right to tear into a succession of hapless ministers – Helen Whately, Matt Hancock, Simon Clarke and Edward Argar – for their selective use of scientific data and other failings on ventilators and PPE.

He was right to blast culture secretary Oliver Dowden for "grotesquely underestimating" the number of coronavirus deaths.

He was right to puncture the Boris love-in on Monday morning this week, criticising the Johnson's first live television appearance after recovering from the virus and questioning the fandom's suggestion that the PM is our saviour.

He has finally seen the light on the idiocies of Trump, who unfollowed him on Twitter after Morgan told off the president for turning the daily White House press briefing "into a rambling two-hour self-promoting rally. He's devoted large chunks of them to trashing the media, attacking political opponents, telling us how great he is, and re-writing history as he tries to defend all the mistakes he's made since the virus first erupted".

After years of cosying up to The Donald – in 2018 his sycophantic interview with Trump was widely criticised – the scales have finally fallen from his eyes. "By far the most reckless and dangerous thing president Trump has done," he wrote in reference to his former mate's bizarre claims that injecting yourself with disinfectant might beat coronavirus, "is use the most powerful podium on earth to air his bats**t crazy theories about how to beat the virus."

Morgan's rehabilitation is complete. When Tory blogger Tim Montgomerie denounced him, earlier this week, as "a principal cause of deepening distrust of the broadcast media amongst the population at large" it confirmed that he had taken over from the *Today* programme as the government's Public Enemy No 1. This is a label which he will, no doubt, accept as a badge of honour.

As a self-identifying PC-crazed snowflake I've got to admit that Morgan – like the popular video-sharing app TikTok, the *Sunday Times* investigation team and toilet paper makers – is having a good crisis.

Like him or loathe him, he is absolutely right about the virus.

> **“ I've got to admit that Morgan – like the popular video-sharing app TikTok, the *Sunday Times* investigation team and toilet paper makers – is having a good crisis**

The suffering of poorer nations will be felt by us all

Whether through self-interest or altruism, we have to help the global south through this crisis, says JOHN KAMPFNER

If you are optimistic about human nature, you might base the following argument on ethics, decency and compassion. If you are pessimistic, you would fall back on self-interest. Whatever the motivation, the problem is the same: how to help prevent the global south from collapsing under the weight of Covid-19?

The word 'problem' is a misnomer. As the head of the World Food Programme put it: the world is facing a famine of "biblical proportions". There is, David Beasley told the United Nations Security Council, only a short time to act. Hundreds of millions of people are being pushed to the brink.

We are all grimly familiar with the situation in Europe, the United States, East Asia and other areas where countries are wealthy or comfortable by comparison. Although performance has varied, all such states initially struggled to cope with the crisis, to find protective equipment for health workers, intensive care provision and testing.

Now, as the death toll is either beyond its peak or is entering it, thoughts turn to the best way of easing the lockdown, of rebooting economies that have gone into freefall. The cycle in developing nations is generally a few weeks behind. They have seen what has happened elsewhere. They are desperate for assistance as they have nothing resembling the infrastructure of elsewhere.

Some basic statistics: most countries in sub-Saharan Africa spend $200 or less per head per year on healthcare annually, some much less than that. In the UK (by no means the biggest spender) that figure is $4,000. Across Africa on average there are just over two health workers per 1,000 members of the population. In Europe it is seven times higher than that. Uganda has 55 ICU beds for 42 million people. Nigeria, the continent's most populous country with more than 200 million people, has fewer than 500 ventilators to go around. And these larger states are comparatively better off and have more sophisticated infrastructure than smaller ones.

The situation in unstable or failed states, from Libya to South Sudan to Somalia, in densely-packed refugee camps or in other places where sanitation is non-existent, is unimaginably awful.

They are confronted by threats on every front. Many countries were already reeling from a series of droughts, other extreme weather and one of the worst locust swarms for decades. As already fragile health systems reprioritise to cope with coronavirus, other diseases from HIV to malaria and cholera, which pose huge risks already, are likely to spread further and to go undetected and untreated for longer.

If these governments had surplus cash,

GLOBAL EMERGENCY: Nigerian children playfully run away from a fumigation machine mounted on a truck in a displaced camp in Maiduguri on April 15. The camps are being disinfected as a preventive measure against the spread of Covid-19

Photo: Getty Images

they would be desperate to get hold of and start using equipment. Unlike the richer states, they have not succumbed to complacency towards pandemics. In Africa they learnt from Ebola; in East Asia it was SARS. Ultimately, though, it is a question of money.

As they scrambled to respond, wealthier states busily grabbed their hands on everything they could find, slapping export bans on vital goods. According to the Centre for Economic Policy Research, these controls have increased the prices of PPE equipment such as aprons by more than 50% and masks by 40%. Even if they do manage to be procured, transport and other infrastructure has been severely disrupted. Supplies of basic foods are imperilled.

Meanwhile, budget forecasts of poorer countries – and their credit ratings – have been slashed, while bond yields (the amount it costs to borrow) have soared. Revenues have plummeted due to falling commodity prices – the oil plunge has been much discussed, but metals such as copper and tin have fallen due to declining demand.

Investors have done what they always do in difficult times and retreated to safe havens. Stocks and bonds in emerging markets have been unceremoniously dumped, as have their currencies, making imports even more expensive.

To add to it all, migrant remittances are considerably below normal and tourism, the lifeblood of many states from Kenya to Cambodia, from Namibia to Nepal, has disappeared. Even when the situation eventually returns to normal, tourism is likely to be one of the latest to recover, particularly long-haul travel.

Those governments that imposed earlier and more stringent lockdowns, such as South Africa, Nigeria and India, are under pressure to loosen them. They face exactly the same dilemmas as those in richer states – the trade-off between further economic damage and the risk of a resurgence of the virus, as has been seen in Japan and Singapore.

Yet such is the difficulty in acquiring testing kits in poorer countries, the proportion of reported cases as distinct from actual ones is likely to be tiny. This means infection rates are already likely to be far higher than shown in the data.

When states of emergency are lifted, the damage will undoubtedly be even greater. Across Africa and elsewhere there has been no safety net for businesses and individuals.

There is nothing in the budgetary tank. There is no concept of 'furloughing' staff. There is precious little state compensation in terms of grants, loans of deferred tax or other payments. People have had to get by as best they can.

International institutions have been trying to galvanise member states to act. The IMF has pledged immediate debt relief for a number of low-income countries. That is a start. The World Bank has been trying to fast-track specific responses, from treatment centres, laboratories, training for medical staff and contact tracing.

China is also promising to assist, making sure that it receives political and strategic advantage with each donation, as it has been doing around the world for several years already. The amounts involved from all the various sources are still small, denominated in single or tens of millions of dollars, and the areas that are covered are insignificant.

Compare all of that to the hundreds of billions, even trillions, of dollars being thrown at the coronvavirus response in the global north.

Much more is needed to help the global south. International organisations and charities are calling for a Marshall-style plan that would both write off existing debt and provide huge amounts of new aid specifically to combat the pandemic.

Famine fatigue was already deeply entrenched among donor countries long before this unprecedented crisis emerged. The fact that richer states understand what this one entails, unlike Ebola for example, and of course unlike famines, is unlikely to have much of a bearing. They are too busy trying to cope themselves with the health and economic consequences of Covid-19.

So much for compassion, so much for egalitarianism or decency. Self-interest is almost certain to be the more persuasive trigger. Europe saw the consequences of mass migration in the mid-2010s – the horrific pictures of the baby boy washed up dead on the beach in Turkey, or the long lines of bedraggled folk being hauled off boats in Lampedusa or trudging their way to Hungary, only to be violently beaten back.

Germany remarkably, heroically, let in one million people. Such was the political backlash, it won't be doing that again in a hurry.

Nevertheless, the cycle of deprivation, instability and violence leading to migration at any cost is set to increase. That will make 2015 seem small.

The best way, indeed the only way to alleviate the consequences of the pandemic on the global poor is to rethink the way we assist their economies. More immediately we need to dig deep to help, precisely at a time when we are at our most stretched and most focused on our own. But if we don't act fast, we will reap the whirlwind – not to mention the extraordinary individual and societal suffering that will make what we have experienced seem small by comparison.

LETTERS: Have your say, email letters@theneweuropean.co.uk

Fatal flaw: Health worker deaths due to negligence

Thousands of deaths in the Covid-19 pandemic is a tragic if inevitable statistic. Dozens of deaths of NHS frontline staff and care workers, however, represents negligence of stupefying dimensions. Now that a leaked Department of Health and Social Care report has confirmed the May and Johnson governments' total failure to act on the conclusions of the 2017 Exercise Cygnus report, responsibility for the deaths of so many health workers lies firmly on the heads of the 2017-2019 government and its successor.

The prime minister now refers to the NHS as "the beating heart of the nation" but he leads a Conservative government and served in the cabinet of its predecessor, both of which have gone some way to starving this "beating heart" of the oxygen it needs to function properly.

Even Leavers cannot in all honesty deny that the preoccupation with Brexit has contributed to the government's negligence in failing to make adequate preparations for the current pandemic. It is an appalling tragedy that many NHS staff and care workers have paid the ultimate price for these shortcomings.

Anthony West
Kent

While Priti Patel's statement hailing the drop in shoplifting has elicited quite a bit of ridicule, it has also done something much worse.

It has deflected attention from the fact that 20,000 people in the UK have died in hospital from coronavirus. That is one of the worst performances in the world and is a damning indictment of this government's tried-and-tested approach of using egregious nonsense to distract people.

People are dying because this government made bad decisions and wasted time while Italy and Spain struggled. They condemned and ridiculed those countries and did nothing to protect the people here.

Do not let them gaslight you into believing that they have achieved anything of merit by seeing a drop in shoplifting or that it would be very unreasonable to hold them accountable for thousands of deaths.

Audrey Christophory

Fit or fiddle?

Boris Johnson's experiences in ICU will have had a profound effect on him psychologically. Are we sure he is fit to return to lead a government 18 days later?

In rugby or football where a player on the pitch has suffered a head injury, the rules are that for the safety of the player and the wellbeing of the team, the victim cannot self-declare his own fitness to return to the field of play.

What process is there to safeguard the nation from a situation where an unfit prime minister returns to the head of government?

This is not just a medical question, this is a constitutional question. Where are the checks and balances in the system?

John Edwards
Shoreham-by-Sea

Lock horns

Sometime in the near future, a progressive 'return to work' must be addressed. We know a vaccine will not be available soon, so the way in which this is organised will be crucial in order to keep our workers safe.

Working practices may need to include appropriate use of PPE, social distancing where possible, routine decontamination within the workplace, plus testing and tracing.

I hope that we might receive more consistent information from the government than we have to date. This is no time for face-saving, but as promised in Scotland, "an adult discussion with the people" would surely be welcomed.

John Castell
Suffolk

Badly equipped

James Ball is wrong to think that stockpiling PPE would result in it being routinely thrown out ("Honour NHS with a renewal of our social contract", *TNE* #191).

All logistics operations can work on a first in first out principle (FIFO) and can manage stock levels based upon demand and use-by date. They could in effect warehouse a reservoir of PPE which is constantly refreshed.

What the lack of PPE highlights is that the government should have passed its planning over to people who know how this works.

Phil Jackman
Morpeth

I was surprised that Matt Hancock was struggling with PPE supplies and guidance as I thought he had a first in PPE from Oxford, as does Rishi Sunak. Since the Covid pandemic, PPE now means something very different to Politics, Philosophy and Economics.

We are constantly told that the government's response is led by science, but only two cabinet members seem to have science degrees: Alok Sharma, applied physics, and Therese Coffey with a doctorate in chemistry.

Interestingly, Germany, which seems to be managing this crisis better than us, is led by a woman, Angela Merkel, who has a scientific education (with a doctorate in quantum chemistry) and career before entering politics.

With three Oxbridge historians (Dominic Cummings, Jacob Rees-Mogg and Robert Jenrick) on board, one might have thought the government would have more of an idea of the potential threat to society posed by a global pandemic. Still, with six people who studied law sitting around the cabinet table I guess they will be well protected should there be any comeback for possible negligence once the crisis is over.

Nick Roberts
Selly Oak

Privilege, Pomposity and Entitlement. With every daily briefing about the crisis, the underpinning values of the ministers become ever clearer.

Now the PM has returned. Lots more PPE, then. Has the country not already suffered enough?

Rex Nesbit

Mask slips

I just don't get it. Why on earth is the government not advising us all to wear face-coverings? OK, not the masks needed by hospitals and front-line workers. But scarves or home-made masks.

Imagine that a face-covering gave 100% protection of me from you and you from me. There would be no need for any other measure to beat Covid-19.

Yes, they say, but ordinary masks don't give 100% protection. Yet this line of argument completely contradicts their case for the forms of protection which they say work.

They told us to wash our hands. Does that give 100% protection? No-one at all believes that one.

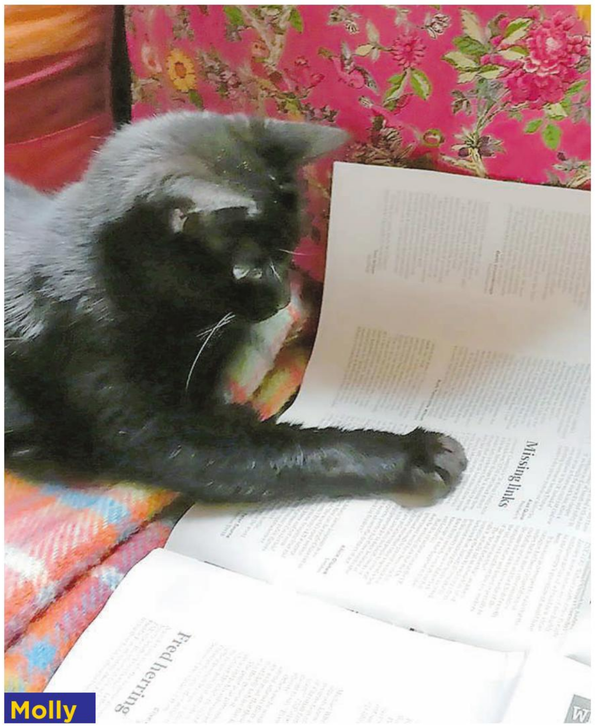
They told us to stay at home. Does that work at 100%? Well, no it doesn't. YouGov found that 25% of people admit that they ignore advice to avoid crowds. So that's 16 million people.

Why does the government want 100% efficiency for one method of prevention of infection but is happy with much less efficiency for the only other two methods that we have right now?

It makes no sense. Especially when, at the end of the day, the UK will have to insist on face coverings for all.

We need face masks to start to get out of lockdown with least risk. We will need masks to reduce the risks of new infections arising during the slow process of contact tracing. We will need masks for all inbound arrivals to the UK. We will need masks until we all get

Animal readers of THE NEW EUROPEAN



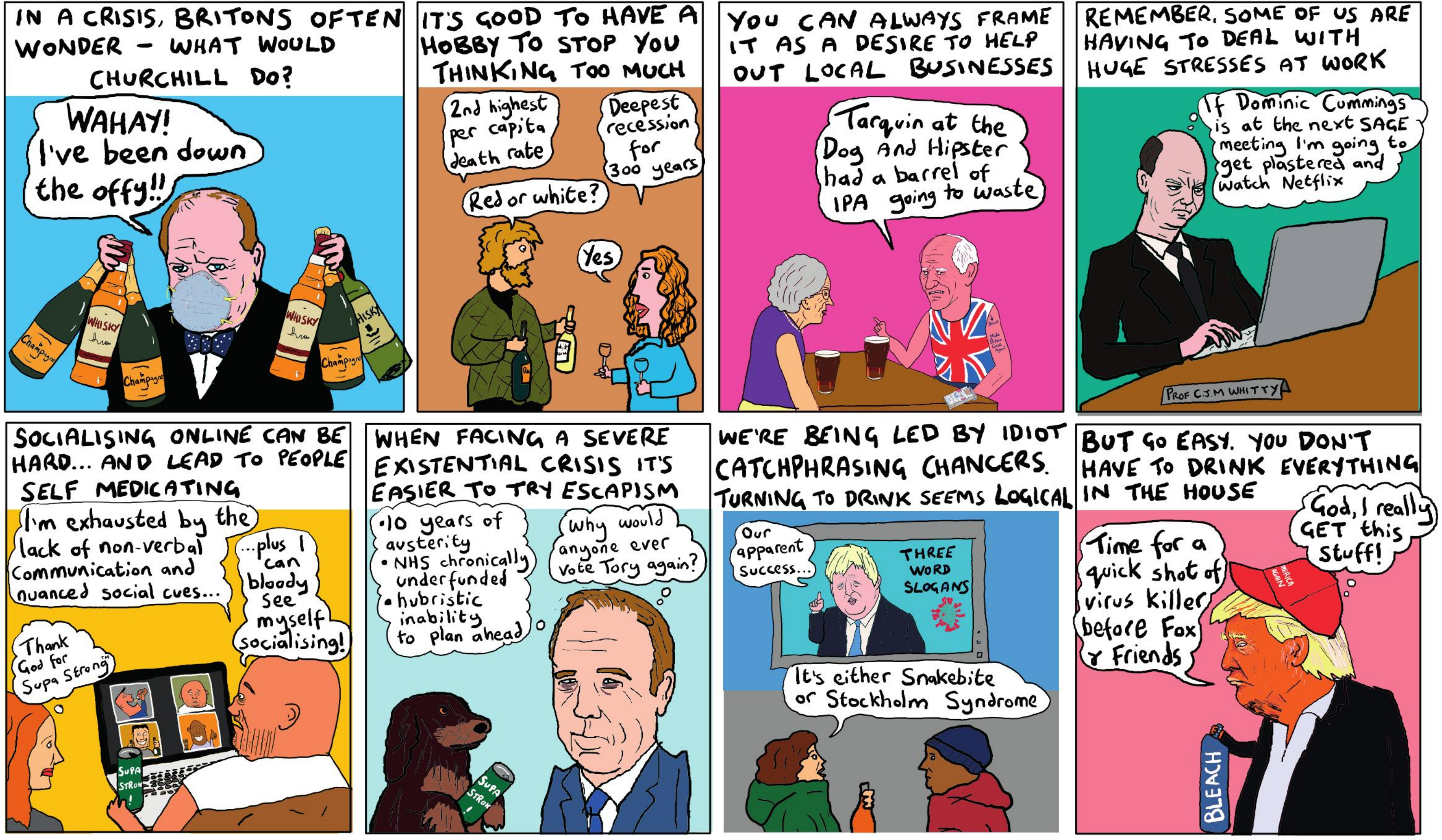
Reader Jule Curl writes: "This is Molly, an 11-year-old rehomed cat I have lived with for over six years. I work at home and Molly regularly sympathises with my political and environmental rants by bringing catnip toys to the desk to calm me. Molly and her sister Mimi approve of lockdown as service has improved, but Molly insists on having the paper first. Both enjoy having Boris-related pages to line the litter tray."

■ Does the animal who runs your household read *TNE*? Send photographic evidence and crucial biographical details to letters@theneweuropean.co.uk, putting 'Animal Readers' in the subject field

What's Going On?

Are people drinking too much in lockdown?

TIM BRADFORD


IN A CRISIS, BRITONS OFTEN WONDER – WHAT WOULD CHURCHILL DO?
WAHAY! I've been down the offy!!
WHISKY
Champagne
IT'S GOOD TO HAVE A HOBBY TO STOP YOU THINKING TOO MUCH
2nd highest per capita death rate
Deepest recession for 300 years
Red or white?
Yes
YOU CAN ALWAYS FRAME IT AS A DESIRE TO HELP OUT LOCAL BUSINESSES
Tarquin at the Dog And Hipster had a barrel of IPA going to waste
REMEMBER, SOME OF US ARE HAVING TO DEAL WITH HUGE STRESSES AT WORK
If Dominic Cummings is at the next SAGE meeting I'm going to get plastered and watch Netflix
PROF C.J.M WHITTY
SOCIALISING ONLINE CAN BE HARD... AND LEAD TO PEOPLE SELF MEDICATING
I'm exhausted by the lack of non-verbal communication and nuanced social cues...
...plus I can bloody see myself socialising!
Thank God for Supa Strong™
SUPA STRON !
WHEN FACING A SEVERE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS IT'S EASIER TO TRY ESCAPISM
• 10 years of austerity • NHS chronically underfunded • hubristic inability to plan ahead
Why would anyone ever vote Tory again?
SUPA STRON !
WE'RE BEING LED BY IDIOT CATCHPHRASING CHANCERS. TURNING TO DRINK SEEMS LOGICAL
Our apparent success...
THREE WORD SLOGANS
It's either Snakebite or Stockholm Syndrome
BUT GO EASY. YOU DON'T HAVE TO DRINK EVERYTHING IN THE HOUSE
Time for a quick shot of virus killer before Fox & Friends
God, I really GET this stuff!
BLEACH

vaccinated or until we all have guaranteed access to some life-saving cure.

Martin Yuille MA PhD
Honorary reader, Centre for Epidemiology, University of Manchester

The German states have made the covering of your mouth and nose on public transport and when shopping compulsory. This is a country where the death count, including deaths outside hospital, is still under 6,000 from a larger population.

We have suffered 20,000 deaths in hospital alone, so our equivalent figure is probably closer to 25,000.

Now, of course we know that expertise in the UK is far superior to expertise elsewhere, and that we always know best. But wouldn't a bit of humility come in handy at this point? I'd hate to wear a mask or scarf anywhere, but I'd do it to keep others and myself safer.

Phil Green

Why does this government always seem to be behind the proverbial curve?

Social distancing was introduced at the same time in Austria and the Czech Republic, but in addition the latter required its people to wear face coverings. Austria's coronavirus daily case count then increased much more than the Czech Republic's.

When Austria changed its mind 17 days later and made face coverings compulsory too, its daily case count dropped, equalling that of the Czech Republic after just five more days.

If more evidence is needed of the importance of face masks, look no further than my hospital's policy in this respect. Only yesterday, I had an appointment for a routine procedure, and guess what I was asked to take out of a box by the nurse before it started? The same basic face mask as hers.

Practical as ever, NHS staff knew that, if I was one of those many asymptomatic Covid-19 sufferers but wore one, the chances of me infecting any patient or nurse would be greatly reduced.

Suzanne Martin

Keir pressure

In early 1943, after the battle of Stalingrad, it was clear Nazi Germany was going to lose the Second World War. The only question was when and at what cost.

The USA and Soviet Union prepared for the aftermath well in advance and ultimately became superpowers. The UK didn't.

Covid-19 is another one of those epochal moments when immense change happens in a short period of time. The Tories don't have the noddle to see this because it is the (now) utter irrelevance of Brexit that they think is the real story of our time.

Keir Starmer ("Starmer's battle on three fronts", *TNE* #191) should be setting up a task force to prepare for the post-Covid-19 and post-Brexit country Labour will surely inherit. The UK can't get left behind again like it did after the Second World War.

Will Goble
Rayleigh

As parliament returns with a new leader of the opposition, the country cries out for Superman. I think, for the moment, we will have to settle for Clark Kent.

Kathy Erasmus
London

No Change

Rachel Johnson refers to her "short spell as a candidate in the South West, a seat which was lost hands down to the Brexit Party" ("Taking a stand is not a failure", *TNE* #191).

The electoral reality was that the six seats allocated to the South West resulted in three Brexit MEPs, two Lib Dems and one Green from the party lists under the PR system.

Perhaps lack of attention to detail was an integral part of Change UK's downfall?

Robert Smith
Totnes

Could it be that to name a new political party 'Change UK' is to risk eliciting the wrong associations in people's minds?

One might be excused in having the expectation that a name such as this would be listed upon the plan that is sited outside one of those trading estates, alongside 'Logistic & Co.' and 'Solution & Son'.

Geoffrey Taylor
Gloucester.

Pride Cymru

I appreciated Peter Trudgill's well-meant attempt to educate your culturally impoverished monoglot English-speaking readers that the "unusual" word order in Welsh, rather than "being the wrong way round" is in fact more similar to continental languages than English ("Uncommon Language", *TNE* #191).

Unlike French or German, which will apparently be of little or no value to us post-Brexit Britons, why not take up a British language, the second most spoken in the UK, with radio, TV and online channels available 24/7 to enrich your experience? You could join the likes of Adrian Chiles and Carol Vorderman in discovering the joys of learning Welsh, with S4C's *Iaith ar Daith*, also available on BBC iPlayer.

Your readers have no doubt heard of the Arthurian tales, but do they know that the original stories can be more authentically enjoyed (in modernised versions) with just GCSE level Welsh?

Welsh musicians and groups have until recently been less well appreciated the other side of Offa's Dyke than they in Germany or Japan, or even the rest of the world – but did you know that you could better appreciate or be pleasantly befuddled by the lyrics of Ar Log or the Super Furry Animals, respectively, with just the help of a tourist guide to Welsh and an online copy of the lyrics?

When lockdown is lifted, there will be a welcome once more in the hillsides of Wales, but a more hearty and appreciative one if you can ask the way to Eryri* rather than 'Snowdon' (*said: «*err. UH.ree*», *err* as in 'error', *uh* as in 'uh oh', *ree* as in 'redirecting').

Marc Evans

Peter Trudgill writes "The name of the village of Betws y Coed in North Wales

Turn to page 18

From page 17

means ‘prayer-house (in) the trees’. *Coed*, ‘trees’, is the plural of *coedon*, ‘tree’.” The correct spelling is *coeden* NOT *coedon*.

Tamzyn Lawrence
Betws y Coed

Peter Trudgill was looking for an English equivalent for a collective noun for pigs, and I would like to suggest ‘swine’ which, unusually, is the same in the plural as the singular.

Given the current political situation, I am tempted to further elaborate on the theme of swine, particularly the Gadarene variety, but perhaps not.

Peter Kirk
Cardiff

Surreal Sussex

Richard Holledge (“Britain’s surreal deal, *TNE* #191) credits André Breton with being the main driving force of surrealism in Europe, but some might argue that Breton’s rigid dogmatic political and social views also put limits to the greater development of the movement.

Breton expelled Dali from the surrealists because the latter supported Franco in the Spanish Civil War, and Breton was a hard-line communist supporter. Breton’s sway over the movement was perhaps more negative than beneficial.

In Britain, Roland Penrose was the most dogged exponent of the movement, supported by his mistress and later wife, the American photographer and surrealist muse Lee Miller (later, much to her amusement, Lady Penrose). From the late 1940s, their home of Farley Farm in Sussex became the meeting place of surrealists and surrealism.

Roland and Lee helped bring Picasso to the attention of the British art world, and they hosted many gatherings of artists and fellow supporters, like Desmond Morris or George Melly.

From 1929-31 Lee was mistress, muse and active assistant to Man Ray. Even in her twilight years in the 1970s, she reinvented herself as a gourmet chef, but always with a surrealist touch!

Roland was much less dictatorial than Breton, but his long-term influence was perhaps just as great.

Garth Groombridge
Southampton

China shopped

I felt compelled to write in after reading the esteemed Andrew Adonis’ “China’s Chernobyl” article in *TNE* #190. It is my fear that in the ensuing months and years of Covid-19 recovery, nations will lose amidst their own deliberations the need to reprimand China, not least as the source of the virus but also the arbiter of the suppression of information concerning it, which cost so many lives around the world.

Xi Jingping and other government officials should be held accountable for their actions – and global powers should not kowtow to China on account of economic and trade interests.

An official inquiry into China’s handling of the crisis should take place, conducted either in The Hague or through the UN.

Alfie Penfold

Nigel Farage is promoting anti-Chinese sentiments. Why give him the airtime?

Those responsible for China’s rise include British businessmen using Chinese low labour costs to sell the British consumers cheap products.

Jeff Atkins

Trump haiku

Trump is our Nero
Tweets, his lyre. He fans flames
Higher and higher

Chris Fitzpatrick
Dublin

Tim Bradford’s cartoon (“Why are some in the USA protesting the lockdown?”, *TNE* #191) almost clarified that Trump voters and their president cannot differentiate between being independent of George III, which is agreed history, and being independent of the planet, which is fatuous and impedes trade.

The US has found that if you try to ignore trouble, it comes for you anyway.

Frank Adam
Prestwich

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Hubble space telescope; a cutting-edge project masterminded by NASA with assistance from the European Space Agency. The other day on the BBC there was a splendid programme documenting this immense achievement.

As we approached the end of transmission one question entered my mind: How did the USA go from this zenith of expertise and professionalism to a fearful country, divided by rabble rousers and extremists; ruled by an orange-tinted, ex-reality TV star who thinks injecting disinfectant will cure coronavirus?

Robert Boston
Kingshill

Beyond Covid

Every minute a child in Africa dies from malaria. It kills around 430,000 people yearly and infects more than 200 million.

A three-day course of anti-malarial pills for a baby can cost as little as 25p. This suffering and loss of life are tragically unnecessary because malaria is largely preventable, detectable and treatable.

The global effort to eradicate deaths caused by malaria should be reinforced and prioritised, not forgotten in the time of coronavirus.

Handsen Chikowore
London SW4

Think again

The direction of political travel for the last 30 years has featured a narrative that in collecting taxes, the state is essentially stealing your money and that responsibility must lie with the individual to provide for themselves and their families.

The alternative can be found in the post-war settlements that established health, education, pensions and welfare systems with budgets distributed from a commonly financed pool. We need to re-emphasise this argument and find a supporting narrative that will be difficult to contradict.

Almost certainly we need cross-party discussions to even begin to repair the damage that has been done to the fabric of society. I believe the priority should be in the area of social care. Boris Johnson told us he had a plan and if it is based around an insurance-based voluntary scheme we should resist with all possible means at our disposal.

If the solutions seem hard and distant, remember that the foundations of the post-war settlement and the establishment of the welfare state were prepared before and during the second world war.

Howard Sherlock
Waterlooville

With the gyms closed, I run round the block at dawn, when the streets are empty. The only activity I have seen has been when they bring out the dead, in a drab van marked ‘private ambulance’.

I pass by at a suitable distance, with mixed feelings. Along with horror and sympathy there is a strange experience of relief.

It has taken a virus to show us that our civilisation is heading in the wrong direction, and if this sort of thinking can gain acceptance, there is a chance for change.

Crisis management is usually what it says, the art of managing a crisis. But the phrase could have an alternative meaning: we need to have a crisis before anything gets managed.

Peter Kirk

This crisis has led us to challenge our beliefs. Do we really need to have long commutes? Have we now got closer to our friends and family and are we appreciating each other more?

We appreciate our health services more and this will lead to increased sustained funding. The world’s pollution charts have changed and we now live on a healthier planet.

When our bodies suffer a heart attack through being stressed out and unhealthy, we change our habits and the way we look after ourselves. Maybe the world has had a coronary attack which will help us to rethink the way we look after it and ourselves.

Tony Howarth
London SW3

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Bonnie Greer

This was the beginning of May, yet the weather was temperate, variable and cool enough...the city was healthy ...St Giles buried two and thirty...

This passage comes near the beginning of Daniel Defoe’s epic *A Journal Of The Plague Year*, first published in 1722.

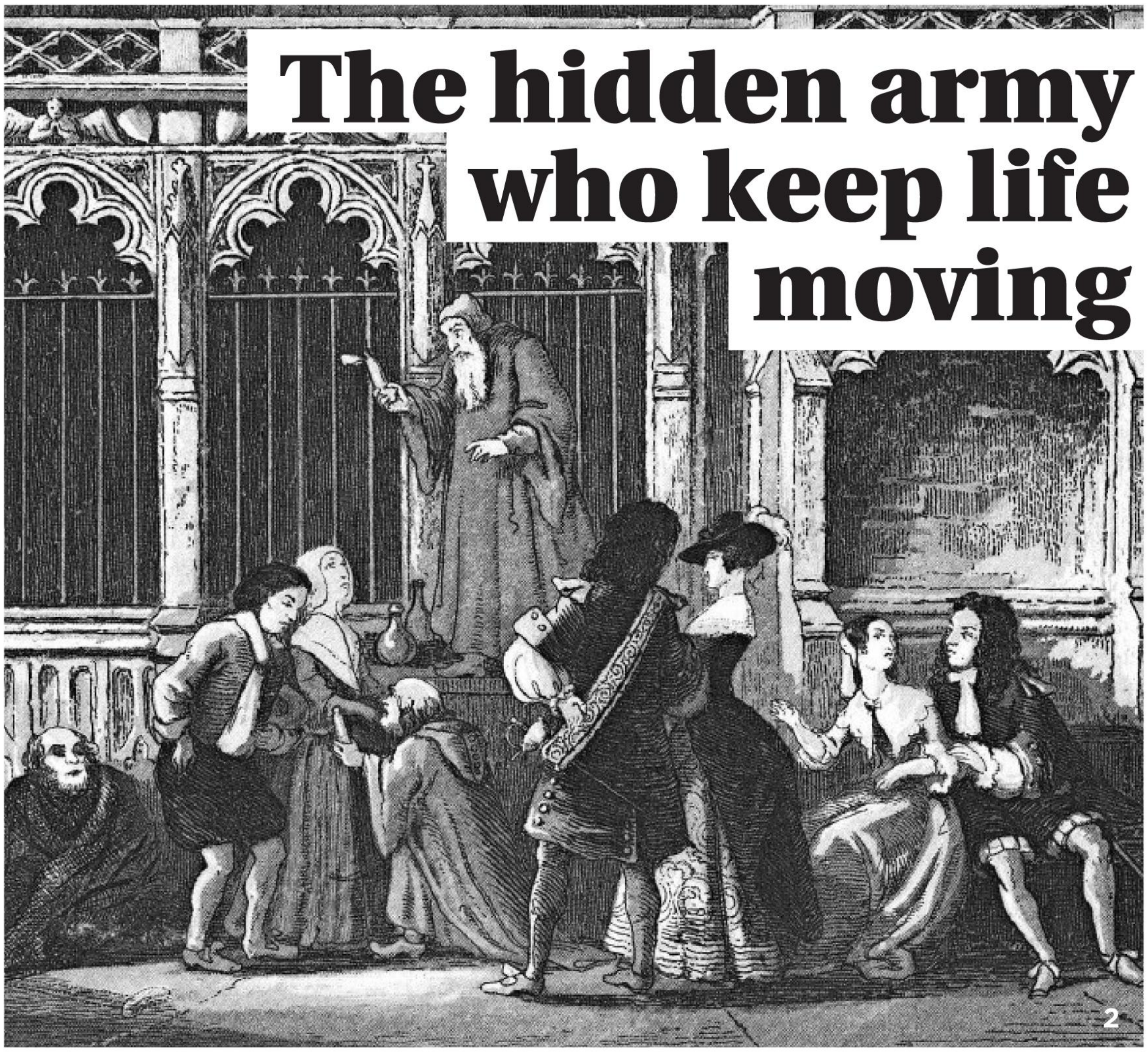
A masterpiece of observational journalism, it describes the outbreak of bubonic plague that London suffered in 1665. Yet it is, in fact, a kind of novel, because at the time of the epidemic Defoe was only five years old.

Signed “HF”, it tells the story of the plague as it played itself out in the capital. Scholars believe that HF, the observer and narrator, signifies Defoe’s uncle, Henry Foe, a saddler in the East End.

Journal tells tales and makes observations about the rich and the poor; the good and the bad. But its brilliance lies in its stories about ordinary people caught up in something that they cannot understand.

Like the coronavirus, The Great Plague of 1665 was invisible, making itself apparent only when it appeared on its

The hidden army who keep life moving



KEY WORKERS:
1 Volunteers prepare food parcels for vulnerable people in Hackney on April 23

2 Scene depicting a grocer's porter buying plague antidotes during the 1665 Plague of London from *Old St Paul's* by William Harrison Ainsworth (1855)

Photos: Getty Images

victims, people who had no means to fight back. They had no knowledge of the fact that pandemics have existed throughout human history. They are part of our human story.

For example, the Great Plague of London was an outbreak of a bacterium that had appeared off and on since prehistoric times. This bacterium, too, was once blamed on China. Until scientists found evidence of it in an ancient Swedish tomb.

Yersinia pestis, the name of the bacterium, may – some scientists believe – have contributed to what is called the Neolithic decline. Around 3,000 BC, European populations suffered a significant decline. Until the theory that this may have been the result of a pandemic caused by an especially virulent bacterium, this wipeout of humanity was a mystery.

It is easy to see how pandemics can shape the course of human history. As Covid-19 may be doing now.

The first victims of the 1665 Great Plague were buried in the churchyard of St Giles-in-the-Fields – as mentioned in that passage from Defoe – in what is now Soho.

In the parish listing of that year, more than 3,200 deaths are recorded. This number exceeded the number of documented households in the parish.

Like Defoe, I am a Londoner. Like Defoe, I walk a great deal.

I live within walking distance of St Giles. I was not able to hear its bells before the lockdown. That's because I live on the other side, one street over from Oxford Street, 10 minutes on foot from Oxford Circus.

Church bells go unheard in these parts. Too many people; too many cars and buses; too much drilling; too many competing musics. I am a metropolitan and I love this.

But now, the quiet, the desertion has revealed a new population to me. One I have never really paid much attention to.

The full title of Defoe's book adds that it contains "observations or memorials of the most remarkable occurrences, as well public as private, which happened in London during the last great visitation".

This is what has occurred to me, this is what I have observed as I venture out about three times a week or so to power-walk and get some fresh air, a strange and new phenomenon in the West End of London.

I then get in supplies and go back inside. I have to package and send some NHS medication to a loved one in France every fortnight. He has a pleasant home there, so the hardship on that score is minimal, but the country is in lockdown, so he's there.

This delivery entails going to the chemist to pick up the medication, and then contacting a delivery service to get it to France. Buying food and going to a chemist are largely unconscious activities for me. I'm usually writing something in my head. But since the lockdown I have noticed something. I have noticed working people, who they are; what they do; what they are still doing.

Defoe observed this too and describes a kind of 17th century social distancing...

The butcher would not touch the money, but had it put into a pot full of vinegar, which he kept for that purpose. The buyers carried always small money to make up any odd sum, that they might make no change. They carried bottles for scents and perfumes in their hands.

At the places where I buy food, the people who work there are on the job, stacking and scrubbing down and being friendly. These are my regular places and I know some of these people. But the smaller food places have a transient population, mostly young.

They are cheerful, too, and work quickly, I suspect to avoid contact and contamination. They stand outside to ensure that everyone is maintaining social distancing, and a few weeks ago kept a close eye on hoarding.

You never know whether a person is shopping for several households, or for the vulnerable, so best not to judge. But it is interesting to watch the staff.

At the chemists, everything is ready, packaged and handed over with a smile. The security guards on the door nod and you can tell that there is a smile under their masks. Maybe someday soon, these guys will be taking the temperature of every customer who comes to the chemists.

The guy who picks up the medicine to send off to France is also friendly and moves quickly and efficiently. One or two guys driving the largely empty buses up and down Oxford Street and Piccadilly Circus sometimes wave.

They are all still here. Still working. These people, who work in the shops, get our food to us, deliver and pick up our stuff, are frontliners. If they did not work, were not at work, society would collapse.

In the United States, people are starting to understand one of the reasons that the ethnic minority population has been hit so hard in this pandemic. Many in this group are what is called 'front facing': the people who deliver stuff; who pump the gas, serve the food, work in the factories, work in the shops, clean the houses. This is nothing new, but now the consequences of it, of this social inequality, are tragically and outrageously evident.

In my part of London, most of the front-facing people are also ethnic minority. I am sure that they are happy to be working and I am happy, too

They – the shelf-stackers, the wiper-downers, the picker-uppers – are out there to help life run as close to normal as possible. They are, in a very real sense, first responders, too. They help keep us fed and watered; medicated. They are heroes, too. I think that Defoe's HF would have noticed them. Seen them as they did their work and made their way back to homes nowhere near where I live. On a bus or a Tube train. Driven by people like them.

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From the good to the very bad..

Alastair Campbell

Editor-at-Large

A few weeks ago I set out 10 principles of crisis management. Now is not a bad time to assess which governments and leaders have done well, and which less so, judged against them. All 10 speak to a central theme that in a crisis, communications must be embedded in strategy, and people taken into the confidence of leaders as they assess and take decisions. Fair to say that two of the countries we often look to for leadership in a global crisis – the US and the UK – do not fare well. Some of the smaller countries have shown far better how it is done.

1. Develop, execute and narrate clear strategy/messaging. My stand-out leader on this is Jacinda Ardern, prime minister of New Zealand. "We go hard, we go early." It sounded like an All Blacks team talk, but it framed her whole approach. Likewise my favourite line, in comms terms, of the whole crisis: "New Zealand only has 102 cases, but so did Italy once." This early framing is so important. Both Donald Trump and Boris Johnson were so determined to play things down, and make the crisis fit to the sense of their own exceptionalism, that they underestimated what was happening, and in many ways never recovered from the early mis-steps. Many Americans and Brits may have died as a result.

2. Lead by example. Like Canada's prime minister Justin Trudeau on working from home, continuing to brief the public daily when self-isolating due to his wife showing symptoms. An excellent example is Ireland's Taoiseach Leo Varadkar. Having lost an election, in the limbo land of coalition formation, he nonetheless rediscovered the qualities that made him popular in the first place – open, straightforward, humane. Most impressively, a former doctor, he returned to help out in hospitals. It showed this truly was a national effort, in which he would lead from the front.

Boris Johnson literally went missing for more than a week as the crisis grew, and when he emerged, it was ostentatiously to shake hands with spectators at a rugby match, before also boasting that he did the same at a hospital treating coronavirus patients. As for Trump, one of the most important attributes of leadership is taking responsibility. From day one, he was looking to place blame, home and abroad.

3. Ensure strong centre. This is easier in a dictatorship than a democracy, of course, but whatever criticisms of the Chinese for their early secrecy, the ruthless centralisation that is their hallmark came into its own in dealing with the crisis itself. South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan likewise, after varied degrees of stuttering starts, got on top of the crisis quickly. In Germany, Angela Merkel made sure that the national and regional governments worked together well, and in German polls, not only has her standing risen, but so has appreciation of politics' ability to deal with problems. Trump's centre was weakened by his constant undermining of state governors and of his own team. Johnson's centre was weakened by his early insouciance, a government machine fixated on Brexit, and a public service infrastructure weakened by a decade of austerity.

4. Throw everything at it. Again, the eastern governments have generally shown the way. I also want to single out Edi Rama, prime minister of Albania, (full disclosure, I work with him) who watched what was happening in nearby Italy with mounting horror, studied the detail obsessively, and went early into lockdown. Curfew became the order of the day. He took the view that the more laissez-faire approach being taken by – here we go again – Trump and Johnson, risked every country in the world being overwhelmed as Italy was. And he knew that Albania might not be able to come back from that. In the UK, outwith some of the economic measures and the fast fitting of new hospitals, "whatever it takes" became more of a slogan than a strategy, and on testing and protective equipment in particular, they were always playing catch up.

5. Use experts well. Taiwan's leadership had politics and expertise in one person, as their vice president Chen Chien-jen is an epidemiologist by background. An interesting phenomenon has developed in Jordan where the health minister, a handsome heart surgeon named Saad Jaber, has become a heartthrob, his daily briefings getting high ratings and rave reviews, creating a new epidemic – 'Jabermania'. Trump is his own most respected and listened to expert, and his relationship with real expert Anthony Fauci has been fraught, and ensured more mixed messaging, not to mention

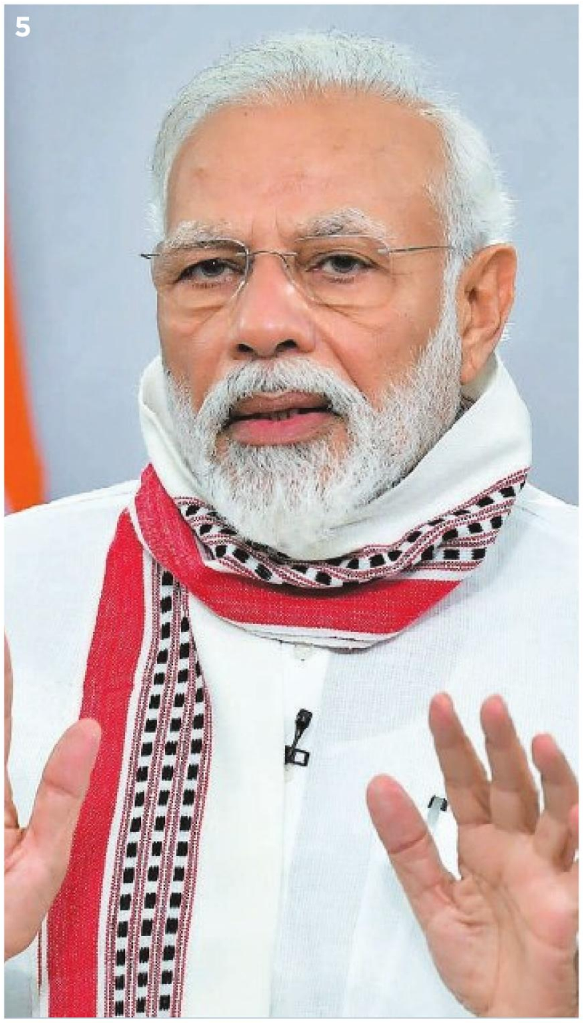
CRISIS MANAGERS:
1 Prime minister of Greece Kyriakos Mitsotakis

2 New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern

3 Taiwan president Tsai Ing-wen speaks during a press conference at the presidential office accompanied by vice president Chen Chien-jen

4 Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro speaks to supporters taking part in a protest against quarantine and social distancing measures to combat Covid-19 in Brasilia on April 19

4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Rating world leaders' responses

5 Indian prime minister Narendra Modi addresses the country on the Covid-19 crisis during a televised speech, in New Delhi on April 14

6 Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau speaks during a Covid-19 news conference in Ottawa

7 French president Emmanuel Macron talks with a cashier wearing a face mask as he visits a supermarket in Saint-Pol-de-Leon on April 22

Photos: Getty Images

stunned disbelief from doctors hearing their president talk of ingesting disinfectant as a possible cure. Johnson was right to involve experts when finally he agreed to daily briefings, but while UK ministers and experts regularly say they are "following the science", they never share it. Some of the experts have come over as spokespeople for the government, not advisers on science. That is why the news that Dominic Cummings attended meetings of SAGE, the scientific advisory group, was so toxic.

6. Deploy strong team. President Emmanuel Macron has led from the front but left a lot of the heavy lifting to prime minister Édouard Philippe. Angela Merkel has ensured regional leaders have been integrated into the crisis management. Trump's determination to have himself front and centre, day in day out, often criticising others involved, has weakened the US effort. In the UK, after Boris Johnson was taken ill, a number of ministers, of variable quality, fronted the government effort. At the start of the crisis, he did not properly involve leaders from the nations and regions of the UK. Mistake.

7. Make the big moments count. Macron's addresses to the nation have been strong. The latest one set new records for a live TV event, 36.7 million French people tuning in. It was long and detailed. He apologised for mistakes made in the handling of the crisis early on. He warned of more sacrifice to come, but he set a date, mid-May, for the first steps to be taken toward ending lockdown. There was no bluster, no mixed messaging. There was hope without it being false hope. His delivery was remarkable.

Trump has been so visible, with so many different messages and inconsistencies, it was hard to tell when even he thought something was a big moment. Johnson did one address to the nation, announcing a partial lockdown, but due to more mixed messaging, confusion over key workers and essential journeys continued for some days. Perhaps the most effective piece of communication in the UK was the broadcast by the Queen. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's communications, normally a strength, has been poor at key moments. When he went into lockdown, he had a comms plan without a real strategy, and chaos ensued.

8. Take the public with you. In recent years, the world has associated Greece with basket case level chaos. Current prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has won widespread plaudits home and abroad for his handling of this crisis. This Bloomberg headline was typical: "Prime minister's lockdown leadership saved Greece during coronavirus." Even among opposition supporters, he has 75% approval. He decided early on the crisis demanded swift and drastic action, and he took care to explain the reasons, the difficult choices and the consequences. His speeches were vital in this. Trump has used the crisis further to polarise. Johnson enjoyed a boost to his ratings when he was taken ill, but that is slipping as the death toll in the UK mounts and people focus on some of his early mistakes, when he was failing to focus on Points 1-7 above.

9. Show real empathy. This is more than saying how much you value nurses or how sorry you are about people dying. It is about paying proper tribute to the dead, and making sure those on the frontline, and those grieving, have the support they need. New York governor Andrew Cuomo has excelled on the empathetic front, in horrific circumstances. Jacinda Ardern has been brilliant on this too. Could any other leader have made a direct address to children, saying the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny were key workers, but they might not get everywhere in time this Easter?

Empathy has never been Trump's strong point. His narcissism has been on full display, which has made it worse. In the UK, the mounting death toll has been announced with a formulaic "sadly xxx have died, and our deepest condolences etc ..." The lowest of many low points was health secretary Matt Hancock, asked how many NHS workers had died, passing the question to the chief nurse. She didn't answer either.

10. Give hope, but not false hope. This has got harder, the longer it has gone on. But those who emphasised how hard this was going to be at the start – several are named above – are likely to be more believed now as they start to talk of light at the end of the tunnel. Trump talking of packed churches for Easter, Johnson boasting about the UK donning a Superman cape, or "sending the virus packing" have both dealt in false hope too often.

Some of you may think I have been too harsh on Trump and Johnson. That is partly because we are historically attuned to expecting more from US presidents and UK prime ministers. But at least one major leader has been if anything even worse, Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro. Any success Brazil has had in dealing with the virus has been despite its leader, not because of him.

Political football: Tories' Project Restart own goal

Steve Anglesey

"It only takes a second to score a goal," said Brian Clough, and coincidentally that is also the amount of time it must have taken the Premier League to come up with the codename for their plan to resume the 2019/20 season, 'Project Restart'. It's not even 'Project Reboot', for crying out loud, although no doubt its sheer lack of imagination will appeal to Steven Gerrard, Neymar, Rio Ferdinand, Kelly Smith, Paul Scholes, Paul Gascoigne and Sven-Göran Eriksson, all of whom called their autobiographies *My Story*.

A second is also more time than most Conservative governments usually devote to thinking about football. Cricket fan Theresa May had no real interest in the game; David Cameron supported Aston Villa only because his uncle used to be chairman, and embarrassingly once confused them with fellow claret and blue wearers West Ham.

Boris Johnson does not follow a club and treated his 2006 appearance in a 'legends' charity game against Germany like he treats so many things, as a well-planned but seemingly hapless publicity stunt. Of his senior cabinet colleagues, only Rishi Sunak (Southampton) and Michael Gove (QPR) are noted as fans.

Which is why it's suspicious that they are suddenly interested in football. With the Premier League due to meet on Friday May 1 to discuss its excitingly-named plan, "there has been a significant shift in the past few days in favour of restarting sport," reported the *Times*, adding: "There is a view that the prospect of live sport returning would create some much-needed positivity."

It goes without saying that adequate amounts of PPE, testing and tracing would also create some much-needed positivity and save more lives than Southampton v Brighton, originally scheduled to take place this weekend. But in the absence of those, or any concrete plans to ease the lockdown, in the belief that people can't be trusted not to start flooding the streets, bread and circuses will have to do.

To facilitate this, the culture, media and sport minister Oliver Dowden – another MP with no apparent interest in football – told a parliamentary committee last Monday, "I personally have been in talks with the Premier League with a view to getting football up and running as soon as possible." You can only hope he gives it a bit more thought than he gave the proposed Saudi-led takeover of Newcastle United, waved through by Dowden's department a week ago despite the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, the kingdom's dubious human rights record and the regime's alleged involvement in pirate Premier League broadcasts there via beoutQ set-top boxes.

And would Premier League football, as imagined under Project Restart, really lift the national mood? The matches are likely to be sombre affairs, played in empty stadia that will still have to be policed to stop intruders and with health workers and ambulance staff still in attendance in case of serious injuries.

Players will be under-trained and therefore more injury-prone in a schedule which seeks to compress nine league games and up to three FA Cup matches into 50 days. Those who were allowed to return to their homes overseas before lockdown will face an added disadvantage if they have to observe the planned new quarantine rules on re-entering the UK. All players will be sequestered between games.

The games themselves will feature new rules (no contact at corners, five substitutes instead of three) which were not in play in the corresponding earlier fixtures. There will be no 'home advantage' of your own crowd roaring you on – a nebulous benefit, you might think, but ask any footballer who has been involved in a successful battle against relegation how much it spurred them on. The overall effect will be, yet again, to the benefit of teams with more money and more gifted squads.

For match-going fans, the *raison d'etre* of the game – the chance to come together with friends, to support your team in person, to be part of a huge group all willing the same result, all feeling the same feelings – will be missing. It will be like watching a stream of a night in your favourite pub without being allowed to be there, or a broadcast of your favourite band playing a gig to nobody.

And to what end? The first round of matches will be compulsively weird and widely-watched (although football is less popular than you think; more than 100 of Sky's 128 live Premier League matches drew fewer than two million viewers last season). But Liverpool, justifiably streets ahead, will wrap up the title in lockdown matchday two, and then all we're left with is relegation and Champions League qualification (though even when the games are wrapped up we won't be sure who'll actually qualify, given Man City's appeal of their Uefa ban).

In short, even the government's hoped-for distraction won't end up being much of a distraction. Ending the season as the Dutch and French have done, with the table as it was and no-one relegated, is a better solution. So (sorry, Liverpool) is voiding it altogether.

Project Restart, on the other hand, is a scheme as half-baked as Colin Moynihan's supporter ID cards, Matt Hancock's pay cut for players without taking one himself, and Margaret Thatcher's plan to withdraw England from the 1990 World Cup finals, which turned out to be the catalyst for the game's regeneration. In short, Project Restart should be Project Nonstarter.

NONSTARTER: Brighton's Dan Burn battles with Southampton striker Che Adams earlier this season. The south coast rivals were scheduled to meet again this weekend

Photo: Getty Images

STEVE'S SELECTION

THE FRUITCAKES

Brexiteer environment minister (and former UKIP candidate) George Eustice suggested a shortage of fruit pickers, caused by the absence of EU migrants who normally do the dirty work, should be eased by workers currently on furlough.

Former 'Kipper MEP Godfrey Bloom wanted the roles filled by "students with nothing to do", while right-wing pundit Andrew 'Tory Boy' Pierce asked, "shouldn't young unemployed people be required to take the jobs?"

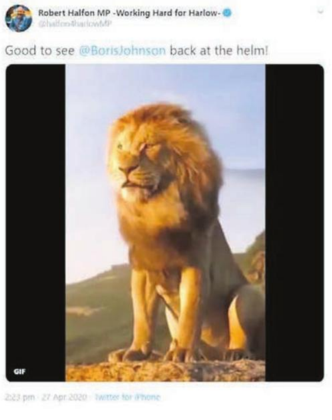
One obvious answer to the shortage in our fields would be asking Leavers, who voted for fewer EU workers in the first place, to pick up the slack. But Bloom explained that these were all "self-employed and small businessmen and women already working". Yes, all 17.4 million of them!

GEORGIA TOFFOLO

Congratulations to the *Made in Chelsea* star, a 2016 Remain voter who came out as a born-again Brexiteer last year, who is getting hitched to former Nigel Farage sideman 'Posh' George Cottrell.

It's perhaps for the best that no honeymoon flights are available right now, as the pair don't have a lot of luck in airports.

Last December Georgia posted a tearful video message after being detained for nine hours in the Maldives after she turned up with a damaged passport, while in July 2016 George was arrested as he and Farage got off in a plane in Chicago. Facing 20 years in jail, he served only eight months for wire fraud after helping the FBI with their enquiries.



Robert Halfon MP -Working Hard for Harlow-
@halfon4harlowMP

Good to see @BorisJohnson back at the helm!

2:23 pm · 27 Apr 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

KING OF THE BUNGLE: Robert Halfon was ridiculed after tweeting a video of Mufasa from *The Lion King*

Photo: Twitter

ROBERT HALFON

The Tory MP for Harrow was roasted for brown-nosing after he greeted the prime minister's return to Downing Street by tweeting "Good to see Boris Johnson back at the helm" together with a video clip of a magnificent-looking adult male lion atop a hillside.

Not only did this spark thousands of quips about lions lazing around all day, eating and mating while the females do all the hard graft, but the big beast in the video turned out to be Mufasa from Disney's recent live action/CGI remake of their own *The Lion King*. As millions of junior schoolers know, he ends up being done in by his jealous brother. Careful with that dinner invite for Jo!

ANN WIDDECOMBE

The former Brexit Party MEP has used her *Daily Express* column to demand more media coverage of coronavirus in one particular part of the world, writing: "If I want to know what this hideous disease is doing to Africa I have to hunt the net. Black lives matter, do they not?"

Of course, the *Express* is noted for its comprehensive coverage of events in Ouagadougou and Brazzaville. But that isn't the only thing about Ann's rant which is raising eyebrows. Just last December, she was showing how much black lives matter to her by refusing to apologise to BAME groups after using the word 'golliwog' in a private WhatsApp chat with Brexiteer activists. "They should not be offended by it," she said.

EXPERTISE

ISOLATED: A deserted Piazza San Marco in Venice on April 19. Italy is the European country hit hardest by Covid-19 and there is growing resentment at a lack of support from the nation's EU partners

Photo: Getty Images

ITALY'S UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY

PAUL KNOTT on the Europhile nation's growing estrangement from the EU, and how to bring it back into the fold

Italy was the European country hit first and, so far, hardest by the Covid-19 pandemic. The support it has received from its fellow EU member states has been patchy.

A sense of being abandoned is amplifying the Italian public's disillusionment with Europe.

This perception is increasing the risk of one of the EU's founding and most Europhile nations eventually leaving the organisation, unless the country's European partners act comprehensively and urgently to redress the situation.

It is not yet completely clear why northern Italy, in particular, was hit so hard and early by Covid-19. One theory is that the unusually extensive trading connections between Italy's densely populated economic heartlands and China, where the virus originated, may have brought it there.

What is more certain, is that Italy had few examples to follow. This led to the virus being transmitted widely and the northern region's excellent hospital system being overwhelmed before the authorities took the stringent action necessary to slow the spread.

Help from elsewhere in Europe was not forthcoming in these early stages of the epidemic. The European Commission accepted Italy's late-February request to activate the EU's Civil Protection Mechanism, designed to prompt pan-European action in an emergency. But not one member state offered assistance. Instead, several of them banned exports of medical equipment in case they ended up needing it themselves.

The lockdown measures imposed in Italy on March 9 are amongst the most draconian deployed anywhere. While the death toll already exceeds 25,000, the signs are growing that these steps have finally succeeded in flattening the initial curve of infections.

The huge cost of the shutdown, though, is that Italy's already fragile economy has taken a devastating blow. Unemployment in the poorer south of the country has hit 18%, with the youth joblessness rate reaching a staggering 50%.

The estimated 3.5 million Italian workers who scrape a living 'off the books' are hard to reach with official income support measures. There have been widespread reports of organised crime groups resurging in some less well-off areas, by grabbing control of food supplies and exploiting the desperate with their loan-sharking activities.

On a macro-economic level, Italy's high public debt to GDP ratio of 135%, which it had been striving to reduce before the pandemic, seems certain to balloon well beyond 150%.

The reaction in other parts of Europe to this exceptional circumstance has been to retreat into their usual entrenched positions and routine haggling over money.

The long-standing split between the

▶ Turn to page 24

From page 23

southern EU nations, who favour greater economic solidarity, and the more parsimonious – and far too often sanctimonious – northern member states such as Germany, Finland and the Netherlands, has unfortunately been replicated by countries in the south such as Italy, Spain and France being the worst affected by the coronavirus.

Rather than pooling resources and making grants to restart the hardest hit national economies for the benefit of the whole EU single market, some northern member states are insisting on, at most, issuing strictly conditional loans instead. The Dutch finance minister, Wopke Hoekstra, apparently with a short-sighted eye on his prospects in next year's general election in the Netherlands, has been particularly irresponsible in indulging in stereotypes about feckless Mediterraneans, rather than facing up to the seriousness of this unprecedented situation.

Such conduct has reinforced the resentment in Italy about the lack of EU solidarity that was sparked by the denial of medical assistance during the early weeks of the crisis.

Disillusionment is now accelerating. One recent poll put the number of Italians in favour of leaving the EU at a disturbing 49%.

Worse, these feelings already had a foundation before the onset of Covid-19. During the 2008 financial crisis, southern Europeans saw how governments in the wealthier EU member states prioritised clawing back money for their banks, whose ill-advised investment decisions were partly responsible for causing the crash in the first place, over the lives of people in Greece, Italy, Portugal and elsewhere.

In the intervening years between the financial crisis and Covid, Italy has also had to cope with the arrival of approximately 670,000 migrants in boats from Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Despite endless appeals and the requirements of EU agreements, the rest of Europe has largely refused to share the burden.

Many hours of negotiations and much media attention will now be devoted to how much, and in what form, EU financial assistance should be extended to the countries worst affected by Covid-19.

DEADLY CRISIS: A priest blesses the coffins of Covid-19 victims at the church of San Giuseppe in Seriate, Italy

Photo: Getty Images

But the EU member states need to grasp urgently that this is a situation in which the long-term politics far outweigh the short-term economics.

Shallow though it may seem to say during a deadly crisis, part of this is presentation.

The EU quickly needs to agree a package of mutual support to overcome the impact of Covid-19 that not only helps in practice but is seen to do so in a big and obvious way.

Ultimately, the financial arrangement for post-Covid recovery will probably be a compromise between loans, grants and assorted other instruments. That is the nature of multilateral organisations composed of nations with their own priorities, preferences and interests.

But the package will also be enormous, perhaps, according to EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen reaching one trillion euros. This support far outweighs the few planeloads of masks and suchlike sent to Italy with such PR fanfare by the opportunistic Chinese, and needs to be communicated as such.

After their initial unconscionable failings – for which von der Leyen has openly apologised – it should also be emphasised that fellow Europeans have provided more medical assistance to the worst affected areas of Italy than anyone else.

In politics, perception matters. As the UK has witnessed over Brexit, the ease with which "Brussels" can be falsely portrayed by unscrupulous politicians as the source of all ills is dangerous. Italy has no shortage of such individuals, such as the leader of the far-right Lega opposition party, Matteo Salvini and some elements of the populist Five Star Movement, which is still the largest party in the national coalition government.

Once the immediate Covid emergency passes, serious questions will start to be asked of the Italian authorities and how they dealt with the epidemic. Recriminations about the actions of the Lega-led Lombardy regional government (which covers the places with the worst death rates in Europe, such as Bergamo) from distressed relatives of the deceased are already starting to surface in Italy.

Inquiries about the national government's conduct will follow too. Salvini and his counterparts are already aggressively attempting to divert the blame and anger on to the EU.

The EU needs to be ready to counter this now both through its actions and how it communicates them.

Its member states also need to learn from the Covid experience to overhaul the way in which they deal with crises at the EU level. They have to change their ingrained habits of only acting once a problem has become chronic.

Their mindset of initially adopting a position of narrow self-interest and haggling from there needs to shift.

As part of this reset, posturing northern European governments must stop conditioning their electorates to believe that the EU and Eurozone are burdens to be grudgingly discharged.

They are actually entities that have largely been skewed to suit them and which bring great riches to their economies. The northern member states need the entire EU economy to be resurrected post-Covid just as much as their southern partners.

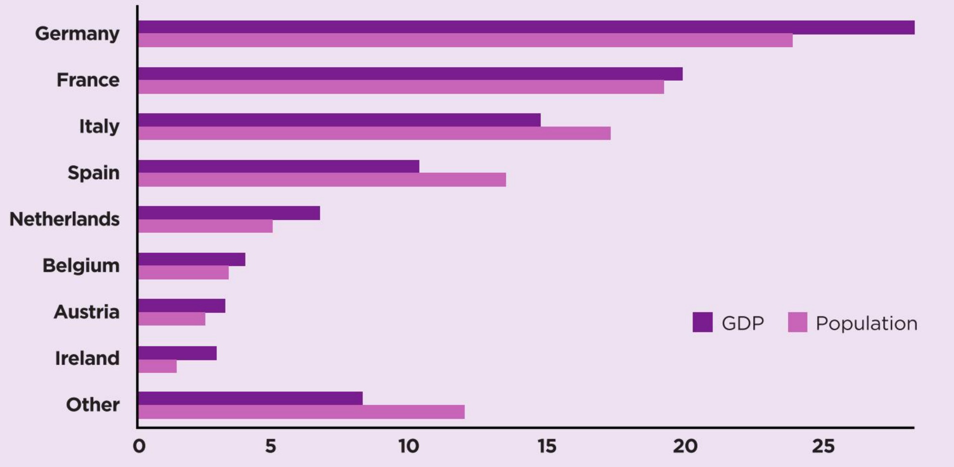
Only a significant change towards more positive cooperation will enable them to preserve and regenerate an organisation that substantially benefits all of them.

The public trust lost through these old approaches cannot easily be recovered. It will take a long time to undo the damage that has been done over recent years to the EU's reputation in Italy and the perception that its partners turned their backs on it during its time of greatest need.

Action to stop it sliding further into an outright rejection of EU membership has to start now with a high-profile and comprehensive programme of assistance to repair the damage caused by Covid-19.

Italy: at the heart of the eurozone

Share of eurozone GDP and population in 2019 (%)



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VIVE LA FRANCES!

Actor and force of nature Frances Barber talks to **TIM WALKER** about Twitter battles, her tangled relationship with Labour and the hedonistic thought driving her through lockdown

At about this time, Frances Barber would have got back refreshed from a yoga retreat in Sri Lanka and be beginning rehearsals for a new play that Mark Gatiss was going to direct at the Chichester Festival Theatre called *The Unfriend*. A long sun-soaked summer of acting with old pals, forays down to the nearby beaches and fruit-filled jugs of Pimm's on perfectly-mowed lawns lay in prospect.

In the event, the only audience that the 61-year-old actress is playing to is on Twitter and the only interaction she's having with her fellow actors is on the telephone. Her mate Sir Derek Jacobi is gardening. Sir Ian McKellen is talking to his neighbours more or less by megaphone. Christopher Biggins is, meanwhile, fretting about whether this will be the first Christmas for decades when he doesn't get to appear in a panto.

Barber is a force of nature who doesn't go into anything without all guns blazing, but she admits she's reluctantly written off the next 12 months and has moments of quiet despair.

"I think we're all now at precisely the same point. We managed to convince ourselves, to start with, it was a bit of a lark, like an extended Bank Holiday or something. But now of course the reality has sunk in.

"What I realise above all is how much I loved my old life. I loved my job and my friends and hugging and kissing them and travelling, and every day was an adventure.

"Now it's about reconciling myself to a much smaller world in my London flat and limiting my ambitions to just trying to remain alive."

There was once a convention in her profession that actors never talked about politics, but Barber, since she first started to tentatively venture the odd opinion on Twitter in 2011, has long since thrown caution to the wind.

In common with a lot of people who weren't seen to be remotely political in the past, Brexit was the game-changer. A life-long Labour voter, she was upset but unsurprised when Jeremy Corbyn – never noted for his support for the European Union – put so little effort into campaigning for the Remain cause in the referendum of 2016. But in the following year's general election she informed her followers that she would vote for Corbyn "holding her nose" and urged them to do the same.

That autumn she tore up her membership card, saying she could no longer be a part of Labour if it was going to be about "misogyny, anti-Semitism and thuggery", and, predictably, brought down upon herself the wrath of Corbyn's battalions of keyboard warriors.

It's fair to say that the irrepressible actress gave as good as she got. She enraged them still more by beginning a very public flirtation with the Liberal Democrats, and, while she never actually joined the party, was happy to go out campaigning with the party's then leader Sir Vince Cable in the Lewisham East by-election in 2018.

Broadly speaking, Barber has been vindicated in the positions that she's taken, but she gets no satisfaction in it. "It's the feeling of vindication you must get in a graveyard. Corbyn's people had their own pre-occupations, but they were certainly not about winning or doing whatever is possible to help working people and the most vulnerable in our society.

"We now have, as a consequence of that long period of utter self-delusion and self-indulgence, a prime minister in Boris Johnson who is manifestly unfit to lead us through the current crisis. Just when we think things can't get any worse, they always somehow manage to. We are now living in an utter dystopia."

Barber was relieved that Keir Starmer was elected to lead Labour, and, to show willing, attempted to rejoin the party. Her application is currently on hold because, she says, the *Guardian* columnist – and frequent Twitter antagonist – Owen Jones objected.

"I'd like to rejoin, of course, but, in terms of things to worry about at the moment, I'd say it's quite a long way down the list. I don't say that Keir is perfect, but he sounds like a proper leader of the opposition and that's just so cheering after all this time when we had got used to something that fell a long way short of that. I was impressed by his cool, forensic cross-examination of Dominic Raab at Prime Ministers' Questions last week. I can't see that Johnson's bluster is going to survive that for very long."

She says that for all her Twitter skirmishes she has not lost a real friend through her outspokenness. "A few have told me every now and again to be careful, but I've still the same friends I had before I started making my views known.

"There are actors, of course, that I work with from time to time who I know aren't on the same page as me, but that's where professionalism kicks in. I did a play in the West End not so long ago with Edward Fox who was a big supporter of Brexit. When we spoke off-stage, we both just kept off the subject. He's a very fine actor and I think it would be obsessive to lose sight of that just because I don't agree with his politics."

Born in Wolverhampton to a mother who was a dinner lady and a father who was a bookie, Barber always saw the Labour party as her natural home. She was the fourth of six children and her early life was hard.

She made it into the local grammar School and then studied drama at Bangor University. In 1984, she won an Olivier for her performance as Marguerite in the RSC's *Camille* and that was the making of her. She is, she says, very much a product of her background.

"I found that the people I was fighting with on Twitter hadn't come from places like I had. There was usually family money, often a public school education and Labour was more of a hobby for them, whereas it's always been a way life for me.

"I could therefore see how high the stakes were – I knew it wasn't just a game. I regret in a way that I didn't go into politics when I was younger – I fear it's too late now – but I thought in

DEFIANT: Frances Barber in *Musik* at the Leicester Square Theatre

Photo: Mark Brenner

common with everyone else that it was safe to leave politics to the politicians. That has of course turned out to be a very tragic misapprehension on all our parts.

"Still, I try not to just sound off on Twitter and understand that real activism is turning out for marches, going out delivering leaflets, and, above all, voting, and that's what I've done. I was impressed with Vince Cable – there was real integrity there – but, in common with the electorate at large, I was desperately disappointed in Jo Swinson when she took over the Lib Dems.

"The party had a real chance to prove itself at the last election and it failed badly. The campaign was terrible. It was of course a huge strategic error on her part – and on the part of Corbyn – to have ever signed up to the election in the first place as it was always obvious what was going to happen, but of course we are where we are."

Barber says Johnson and the cabinet he picked were pre-programmed for the sole purpose of delivering Brexit and they couldn't, from the outset, adapt to the new reality of coronavirus. "They were complacent and that complacency unfortunately set the tone. Towards the end of my run in *Musik* at the Leicester Square Theatre, I remember asking my dresser if he'd heard anything about coronavirus, and, of course, listening all the time to *Sounds of the Seventies*, he hadn't. Then I noticed Chinatown just around the corner from the theatre was emptying out and an Uber driver told me he'd picked up some people from China at Heathrow who'd been coughing and he was terrified, and I remember telling him not to worry.

"The Friday before lockdown I was due to be narrating a new reality dating show for Channel 4 called *Five Guys a Week* and that was when I realised it was too great a risk to go out."

Barber has since been entertaining her Twitter followers – getting on now for 50,000 – with pictures of the dishes she has been preparing for herself during lockdown and a photograph of herself in huge dark glasses, a mask and a hat ready to go out to do her food shop that recalled the Vincent Price horror film *The Fly*.

"I've savings that will keep me going for perhaps, at a stretch, a year, but every penny now matters. I can't complain about my situation since I know a lot of people have it far worse than me. I know there are mums with kids in high rises trying to cope on their own, or, what's worse, they're having to share a very confined space with an abusive partner.

"Within my profession I can tell you of any number of stories of genuine deprivation, too. Everyone in theatre works from hand to mouth and for the love of it and there are stage hands and dressers and box office staff who are now in desperate straits. A lot of them – through no fault of their own – just don't fit into the categories that the government is going to assist financially. I hear of how some of the big employers such as Cameron Mackintosh are being very honourable and trying to keep everyone going, but clearly this can't go on forever and we can't allow anyone to starve. Other big theatre managements are now on the brink of collapse.

"One major theatre director was saying to me that he couldn't see people returning to theatres until there is a vaccine, and, while I'm encouraged that testing has started at Oxford, there are no guarantees when we will eventually have one.

CLOSE UP: Frances Barber ready to face the shops during lockdown

Photo: Twitter

"There is no way in the meantime you can have social distancing in theatres – having members of the audience sitting a few places apart – and for it to be financially viable. Audiences in masks? Actors in masks? It all starts to feel a bit preposterous, particularly if it's *Romeo and Juliet* and there are going to be love scenes.

"The West End alone has been giving billions and billions over the years to the exchequer and the chancellor now has to make theatre a special case. More people go to theatres each year than to football matches and its part in building up the morale of the nation has been incalculable.

"Speaking for myself, I can't tell you how much I miss acting. It is the great love affair of my life. It's what I do. It's so much a part of my whole identity."

As to whether a great play will ever one day be able to do justice to these times, she is doubtful. "I heard someone saying the other day that what we are going through is unprecedented, but that word doesn't even begin to cover it. It's something that's epic – that's actually Biblical – in it's scope and I don't think any of us can really quite cope with the scale of it.

"We focus on maybe our weekly forays to the shops and our own lives because we can't even begin to think of the effect it's having on the whole world. I don't believe any playwright could capture that. In his very prime, Shakespeare maybe – just maybe – but he alone could ever have found the words to describe this."

Still, as anyone who has ever tried picking a fight with Barber on Twitter knows only too well, she is not a lady who surrenders easily. Her final words to me are characteristically defiant. "People talk a lot about the Spanish flu and it seems as if we are going to have to go through that whole process again. A lockdown, followed by an easing of that, followed by more deaths – more, in the case of the Spanish flu, than died in the First World War. That's the depressing part. The thing to focus on is that awful time was followed by the Roaring Twenties. They roared precisely because people appreciated each other more than they'd ever done before and they appreciated what they'd previously taken for granted. I tell you that, after all of this, I'm going to party like I've never partied before. I've no doubt that we all are."

PREPARE FOR DAWN OF THE ‘NEW NORMAL’

CLEARER SKY THINKING: London’s Tower Bridge as the sun rises on April 26, 2020

Photo: Getty Images

Mitch Benn

Comedian, Musician, Writer

First of all, many thanks to those of you who sent messages of support and condolence after last week’s column; Harry’s family send their thanks.

Now, for the record – and I shouldn’t imagine this will come as a surprise – I am *not* one of those relentlessly upbeat people who insist you should always put a positive spin on whatever situation you find yourself in. Nor am I one of those spiritual types who believe that “everything happens for a reason”.

It doesn’t. Everything happens as a result of a cause, but ‘cause’ and ‘reason’ are not interchangeable concepts.

Not every circumstance is a ‘teachable moment’. Some things don’t kill but don’t make you the least bit stronger either. Sometimes there is no positive to *ack-sent-you-ate*.

Some things just plain suck.

There will be lessons to be learned from this crisis, and it will be up to those of us left standing to ensure that those lessons *are* learned, as there will be lots of very powerful people working hard to ensure that they’re not.

But while it’s too early to draw any conclusions, it’s not too early – indeed it’s the ideal moment – to start asking questions, and one question which needs to be asked is this: while we’re all obsessing about when things can return to ‘normal’, what sort of ‘normal’ do we want things to return to?

There was a photograph doing the rounds on Twitter last week which seemed to be a source of awe and wonder to our American friends.

They were excitedly passing it around each other and discussing how it looked like something from a magical fantasy story.

To me it appeared, at first, unremarkable; a picture of the Los Angeles skyline as seen from just outside the city centre. Then I twigged what all the fuss was about: the city was in pin-sharp focus under a crystal clear blue sky, with the mountains beyond plainly visible. And I realised (as the American tweetsters had immediately) that in every other picture I’d ever seen of downtown LA, the city had been shrouded in a thick yellow smog of car exhaust fumes.

I myself live in a very quiet and green place on the outskirts of London, but even here I’ve noticed that, stepping out into my little garden after dark, I can see something I haven’t ever seen in the night sky in the years I’ve lived here.

The stars.

Something which has become apparent during this lockdown is that a far higher proportion of us than we’d perhaps expected are now capable of doing most if not all of the work our various jobs entail from home (and, as many have pointed out, that those of us who can’t work from home aren’t getting paid enough). And yet, right up until a few weeks ago, the vast majority of us were still dutifully schlepping into offices for 9am for, it would appear, no real reason except that It’s How We’ve Always Done It.

Fair enough, until a decade or so ago it was the only way to do it; the advances in information technology which are now keeping businesses functioning hadn’t yet been made. But they *have* now been made, indeed most of them were made a good few years ago, but only now that we have no choice but to work remotely are we taking advantage of them.

When the siege is lifted, when the church bells ring again… are we going to go back to the way things were?

Just imagine, if you will, a world without the rush hour.

It’s not just environmental damage done by moving that vast weight of people into and out of commercial centres twice a day; it damages *us*. The stress, the tension of being stuck in traffic as the clock ticks towards 9, the (it turns out) danger of spreading disease by cramming people into overstuffed trains… and now we learn that we didn’t have to be doing this?

Imagine if we weren’t doing it. Imagine if ‘going to work’ every day consisted of rolling out of bed at 8.45 and fixing yourself some coffee.

Imagine how much easier those people who have no choice but to physically go into work would find it if all those who didn’t have to travel were sat at home on their laptops. And, while we’re thinking big, imagine the reduction in oil dependency (and concomitant implications for world peace) if everyone in the industrialised world started only using their cars for things like doing the big shop and going on weekend breaks?

Sometimes something unexpected has to happen to bring about change. Only now that we’ve been forced – hopefully temporarily – to alter the way we live does it become apparent that the way we’ve been living doesn’t actually make a lot of sense.

Stay home, stay safe, and start thinking about what we want ‘the new normal’ to be.

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EUROFILE

THE GREAT STONEFACE: Buster Keaton clings to the front of a train in his favourite movie, *The General* (1926)
Photo: Getty Images

THE KEATON CHRONICLES

As a new collection of Buston Keaton's films is released, JAMES OLIVER charts the rise, fall and rise again of the man dubbed the Great Stoneface

As great discoveries go, it wasn't quite up there with finding King Tut's tomb. Even so, you could forgive James Mason some boasting.

The British film star had bought property in Beverly Hills and was doing it up when he found something the estate agent hadn't mentioned: a hidden vault.

Unable to resist, he opened it up and found a cache of nitrate film, placed there by the man who had built the house Mason now owned.

His name was Buster Keaton and it's very much to be hoped he doesn't need an introduction. Although a star of silent movies, he's one of the few still familiar today, famous for his deadpan appearance and death-defying stunts.

Had the cinemas not been closed down as a result of the coronavirus you could have got a flavour of his work from a new documentary, due to have been released, called *The Great Buster* (directed by Peter Bogdanovich). Alas, you'll have to wait for that now. Luckily, you can go straight to source instead, since there's a new, lovingly curated box-set of some of Keaton's films (*The Navigator*, *Seven Chances*, *Battling Butler*).

Watch them and you'll see why he's one of the few movie makers that can be labelled a genius without accusations of hyperbole.

He started in cinema when both he and the medium were young; the same age in fact – both arrived on the scene in 1895.

Like most early movie comics he'd come from the stage; his parents were show folk and he'd been appearing in their act since he was three. But in his early twenties he was anxious to go solo and an offer from a film company allowed him to do just that.

Although he had a reputation in vaudeville, he was happy to start off as a supporting player, specifically in the service of Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle, one of the most popular funnymen of the time. The standard format in those days was the 'two reeler' film, which lasted about 20 minutes and were cranked out roughly every six weeks.

Arbuckle was a generous boss and welcomed ideas. And since Keaton was awash with those, he became more and more central to the productions.

He liked Arbuckle and enjoyed the work, but he was too good to remain a wingman forever. Producers approached him and invited him to produce a few two reelers of his own. With Arbuckle's blessing, he accepted and flew the nest. (Keaton would not forget his friend: Arbuckle was at the centre of the most infamous Hollywood scandal of the 1920s and despite being completely, verifiably, innocent, he was 'cancelled', as the young folk like to say. Anxious to help, Keaton defied an effective blacklist to put Arbuckle on staff as writer/gag man.)

Now in charge of his own productions, Keaton set to work. It can't be emphasised enough just how great the jump between the Arbuckle two reelers and Keaton's own films is, to modern eyes at least.

We move from solid, amusing entertainments to works of pure comedy brilliance, underpinned by a sensibility that feels far more contemporary than Arbuckle's clowning.

What's more, Keaton seemed to hit his stride right from the start, finding a character he would continue to play – with only minor variations – thereafter.

Sporting a flattened pork pie hat (actually a cut down stetson), the

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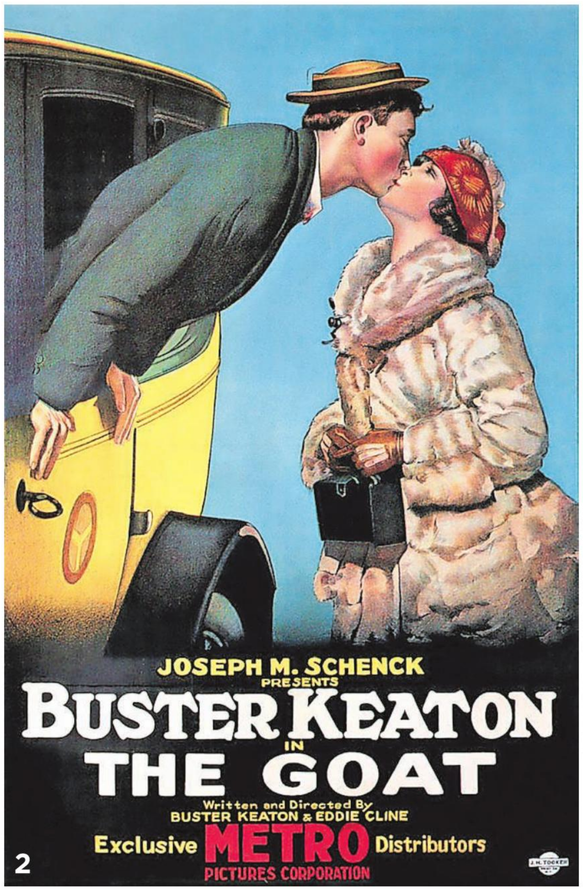

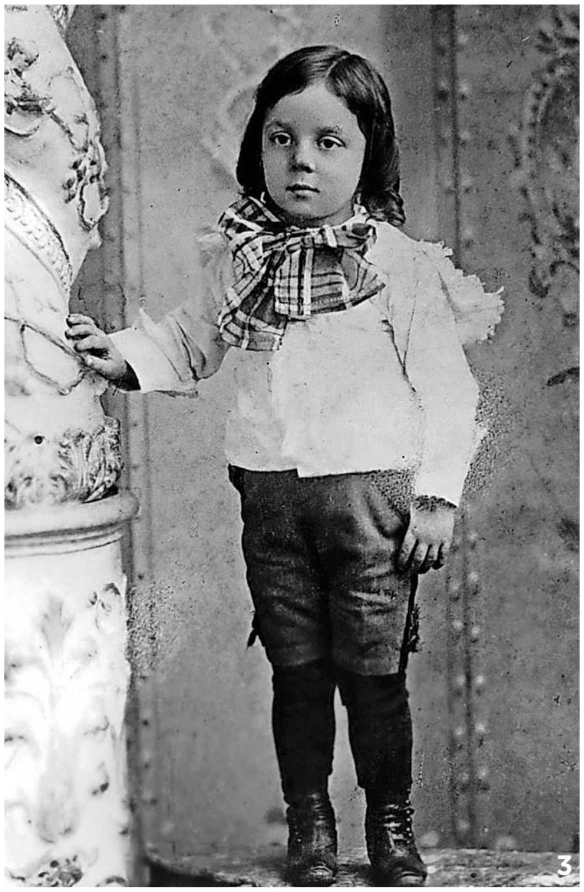

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COMIC GENIUS:
1 Buster Keaton, 1920

2 Poster for Keaton's *The Goat* (1921)

3 Five-year-old Buster Keaton, 1900

4 Keaton on set with long-time friend and collaborator Fatty Arbuckle

Photos: Getty Images

> “The work suffered and so did Keaton, hitting the bottle hard. He was committed to a psychiatric ward – just a couple of weeks to dry out but just enough to leave a stigma

on-screen Buster is a stoic figure slightly baffled by the world, who takes every mishap in his stride: The Great Stoneface he was nicknamed, in tribute to his unflappability.

(A quick note on names: he was born Joseph Frank Keaton but family lore had it that he was re-christened as an infant after taking an almighty tumble and standing up unscathed. An onlooker commented to his parents, “that's some buster your kid took,” using the stage-folk's expression for a prat fall, and a nickname was born.)

He made 19 two reelers, his energy and inspiration rarely sagging. These short films brim with gags and invention. The titles give some sense of the settings (*The Haunted House*, *The Boat*, *The Electric House*), perfect playgrounds for Keaton's remarkable comic instincts.

As good as the two reelers were/are, however, it's the feature films on which his reputation rests. As with so many things in the silent era, it was Charlie Chaplin who established the trend for longer films. Despite some misgivings – could he sustain a comedy for an hour or more? – Buster agreed to follow suit.

Now, it should be noted that Buster, unlike Chaplin, was never a one-man band: he had a loyal stable of gag-men and other associates, and was never shy about sharing credit.

Much of this work was conducted on the set. Although something a bit like a script was written in advance, this was only a rudimentary outline, honed in front of the cameras until he was happy.

And if stricken with comedian's block, he'd convene an impromptu game of baseball to blow the cobwebs away.

It worked. Whatever misgivings he might have had about working in a longer format were soon forgotten; Keaton remained as prolific and imaginative as ever. In fact, the increased running time seems to have juiced his creativity, allowing him develop ideas that emerged from the storyline, rather than rely on (exquisite) slapstick alone. It's a measure of how effective he was in those days that films as good as *Our Hospitality* or *Go West* aren't usually placed at the very front rank of his achievements.

That front rank would include things like *Sherlock Jr.*, in which a daydreaming movie projectionist imagines himself stepping into the film.

Pointy-headed academics hail it as ‘postmodern’ *avant la lettre* and hail it as one of the first deconstructions of cinema. All of which is true, but don't worry if you don't notice it because you're too busy laughing. There would also be *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, which not only features the funniest moustache in movie history but also builds to one of the best

Turn to page 32

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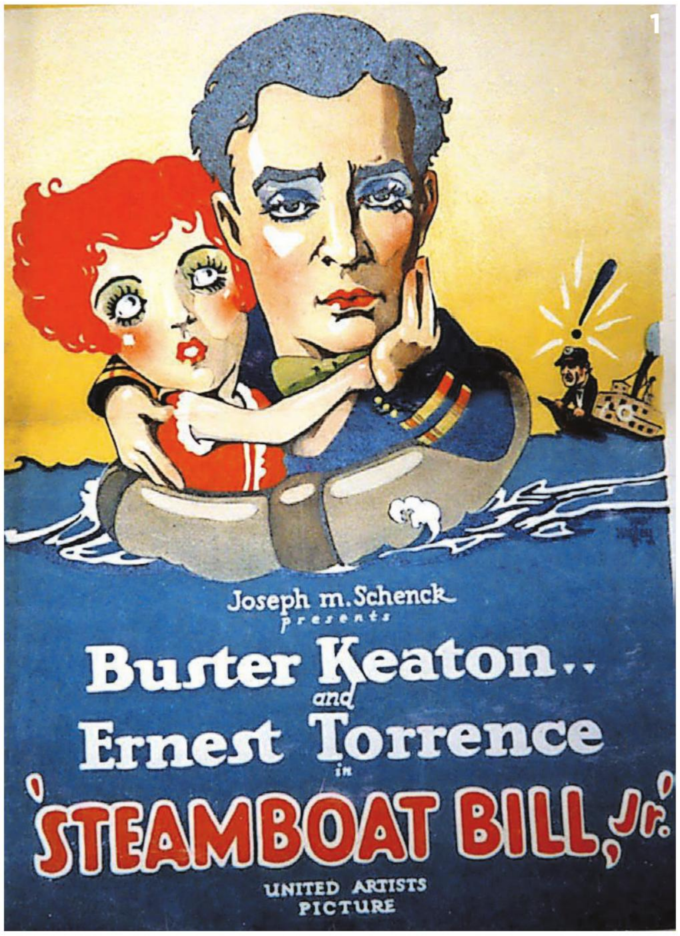

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DECLINE:
1 Poster for *Steamboat Bill, Jr* (1928). A surprising box-office flop, it was the last film for Keaton's independent production team and set of gag writers

2 Buster Keaton on location, 1924

3 Keaton hitches a ride on the front of a policeman's motorcycle in silent classic *Sherlock Jnr* (1924)

4 Poster for *The Haunted House* (1921)

Photos: Getty Images

SCANDAL: Fatty Arbuckle, 1920

Photo: Getty Images

FATTY'S FALL

Fatty Arbuckle's career was overshadowed by scandal after he was charged over the death of actress Virginia Rappe. She was found screaming in agony in a hotel room in San Francisco and died days later from peritonitis, caused by a ruptured bladder. Arbuckle and Rappe had been partying in the hotel and he was accused, by a friend of Rappe's, of having raped the actress. A medical examination found no evidence of sexual assault.

The scandal saw Arbuckle face three trials. The first two ended in hung juries. After a third trial in 1922, the jury took just a few minutes to unanimously acquit Arbuckle – he was found guilty only of drinking bootleg alcohol.

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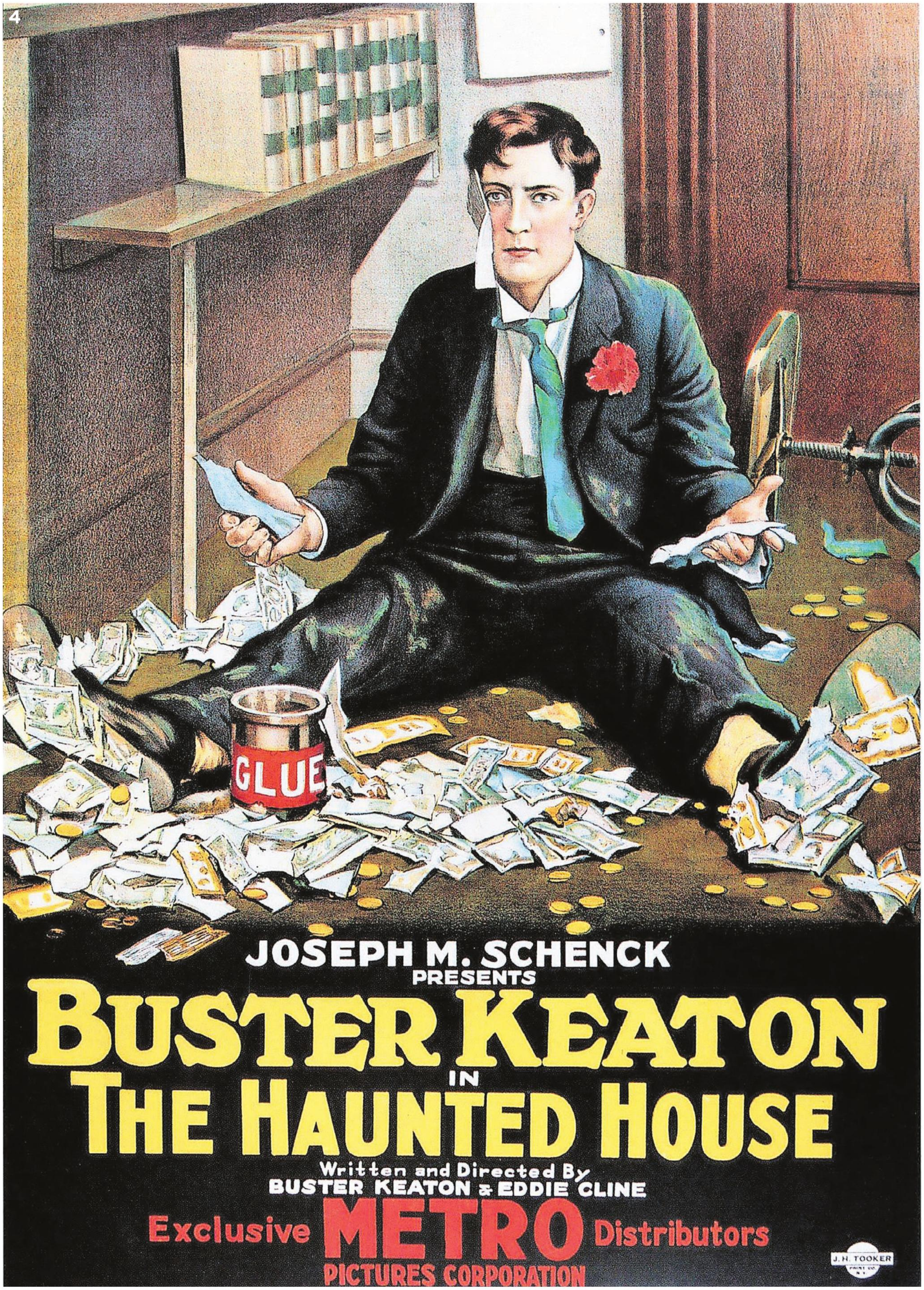


From page 31

climaxes as a hurricane breezes in and Buster has to avoid the flying debris.

Keaton's own favourite was *The General*, a US Civil War saga with Buster's character in charge of a runaway train.

It was the most expensive thing he ever did and probably the most dangerous. Although a certain amount of movie trickery was involved, for the most part Buster is actually doing what you see him doing on screen, whether running along the roof of a moving train or leaping between locomotives.

The train crashes off a burning bridge at the end; they did that for real too, at vast expense.

It was that film that, inadvertently, triggered the decline. Until then, Keaton had been self-financing each film from the profits of the last. But *The General* flopped. His business manager had long wanted Keaton to surrender precarious independence and take sign with a studio: this financial failure finally persuaded his client to accept, albeit reluctantly.

This was around the time when talking pictures were taking over, destroying many silent screen careers in the process. But it wasn't sound that did for Buster Keaton – he was actually eager to use the new technology and the potential for hilarity it offered.

No, what capsized Keaton were his employers at MGM studios. They ran a factory and didn't take too kindly to his preference for extemporising: instead, he had to punch the clock and do as he was told. Scripts were laboriously written, shooting was truncated and schedules maintained. There were no more games of baseball.

The work suffered and so did Keaton, hitting the bottle hard. It was around then he was committed to a psychiatric ward – just a couple of weeks to dry out but just enough to leave a stigma.

As he'd helped Arbuckle, now other old friends helped him – the Marx brothers hired him as a gag-man. Not much, just enough.

But there's a happy ending. After his first marriage ended (blame the booze), he married again; Eleanor Keaton got him back on his feet and making with the funny stuff again.

His old rival Charlie Chaplin gave him work in *Limelight* (1952) and soon after that, James Mason made his find.

With the films back in circulation, Keaton started to get some of the acclaim he was due: film critic Roger Ebert called him "the greatest actor-director in movies" and that sounds about right.

He even found he had some unexpected fans: he was cast by no less than Samuel Beckett in *Film*, the Irish writer's excursion into cinema.

Keaton died in 1966 but he's still revered. Paul Merton and Jackie Chan both admit to taking plenty from the master: Merton the deadpan delivery, Chan the comedy stunts. Their advocacy – and that of many others– have drawn new audiences to the films.

Those films are coming up to a hundred years old now but they've barely dated. That alone is enough to claim him as one of the greatest artists of his century. And probably the funniest too.

■ The *Buster Keaton* box-set has just been released by Eureka

THE ART OF SIN

RICHARD HOLLEDGE considers the troubling implications of a now-postponed exhibition which took sin as its theme

It is devilishly difficult getting to grips with sin. Are the wages of sin death, as the Bible has it? Or for the non-believer, an affront to society to be punished according to the mores of time and place?

Or can it be dismissed in these heathen times as a mediaeval, outmoded concept? Perhaps more a matter of humour. As the actress Mae West opined: "To err is human – but it feels divine."

An exhibition at the National Gallery simply entitled *Sin* had been due to open on April 16, fittingly enough in the week after Easter when 'Christ died for our sins'.

It draws predominantly on its own collection – one third of all the works in the Gallery's collection of western European art are of religious subjects – to explore the subject through the eyes of 15 artists including Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553), Bronzino (1503-1573), Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625), and, from the Dutch Golden Age, Jan Steen (1626-1679).

There are also secular offerings from William Hogarth (1697-1729), and coming up to date – but not from the National collection – works by Andy Warhol, the sculptor Ron Mueck and Tracey Emin.

While we wait for the gallery to reopen, the exhibition's scholarly catalogue by curator Dr Joost Joustra is for sale online and offers more detail, discussion and context than perhaps a trip to the gallery might have afforded, though as Dr Joustra suggests: "I think we will appreciate the real thing all the more when this is over."

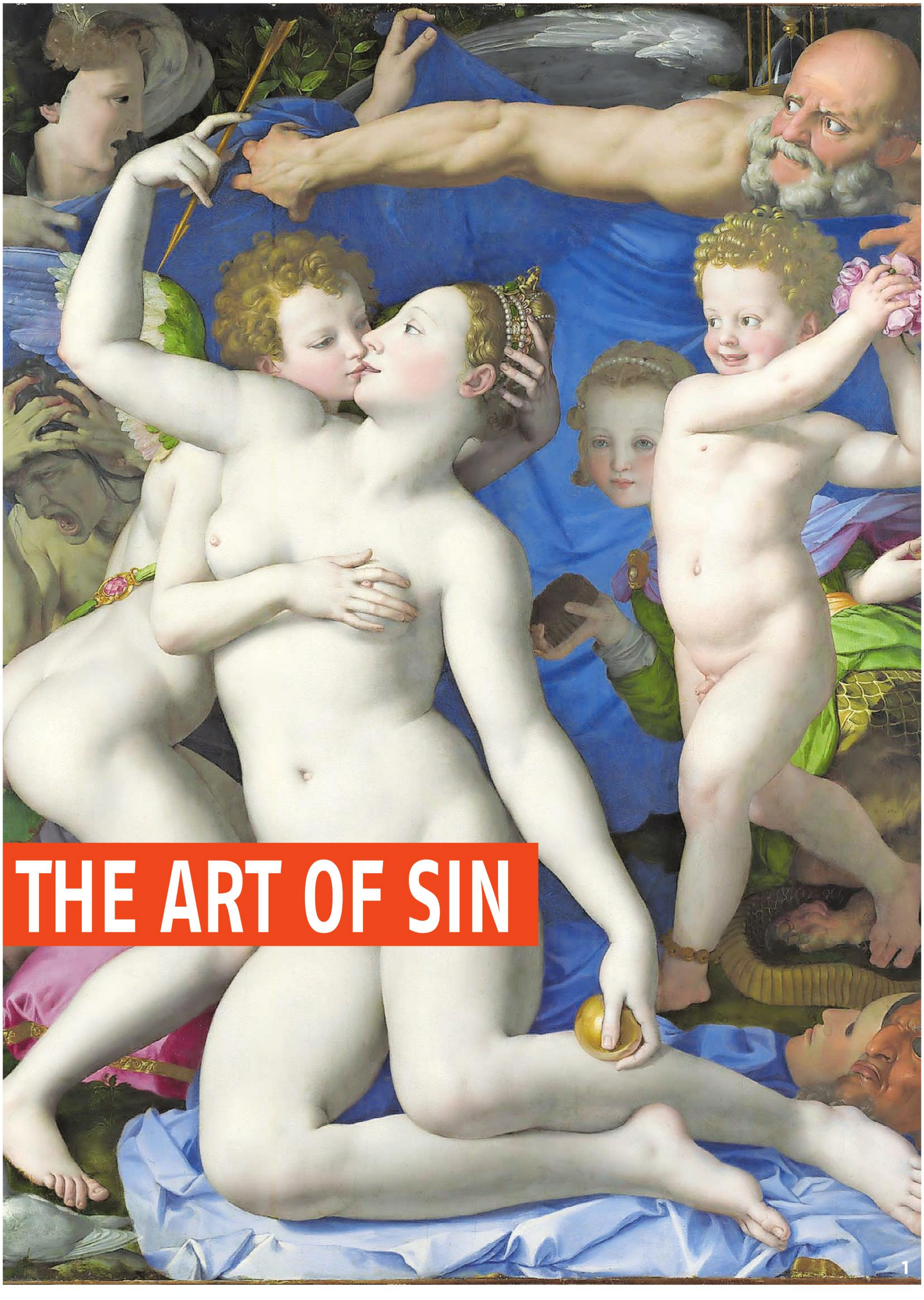
And while we wait, sin continues to rear its tempting head.

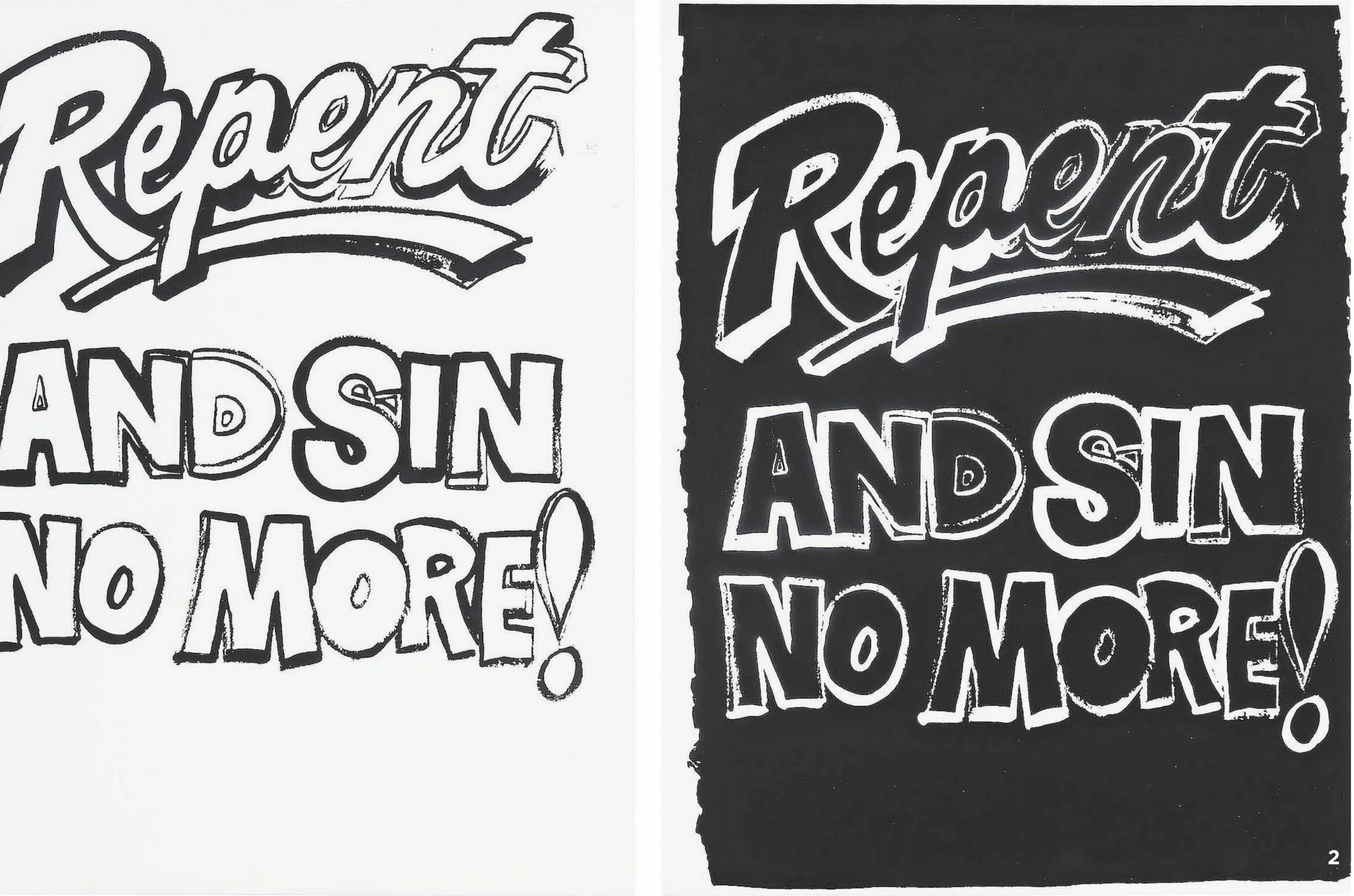
In the beginning there was *Adam and Eve*, painted by Cranach the Elder in 1528 at a time of religious turmoil. In 1517 Martin Luther had nailed his protest against the corruption of the Roman Catholic church to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg, Cranach's home town and with that defiant gesture the Protestant Reformation began. Cranach painted 50 versions of the Garden of Eden, including this depiction of the errant pair who could have stepped from the pages of *Paradise Lost* written in 1667 by the staunchly Puritan John Milton:

Best Image of my self and dearer half,
The trouble of thy thoughts this night in sleep
Affects me equally; nor can I like
This uncouth dream, of evil sprung I fear;
Yet evil whence? in thee can harbour none,
Created pure.

In Cranach's portrayal the 'pure' Eve has a distinctly knowing look as she tempts Adam with the apple. He, on the other hand, is puzzled, torn between duty and temptation, scratching his head as if

Turn to page 36





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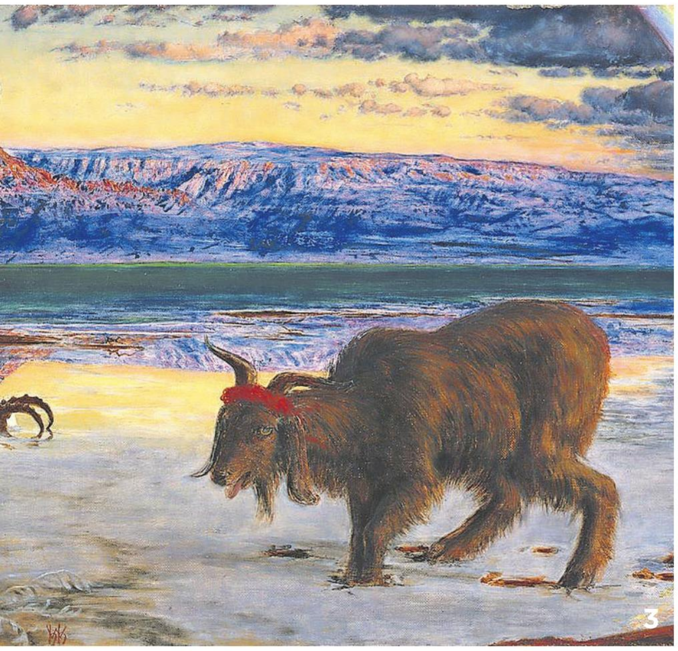

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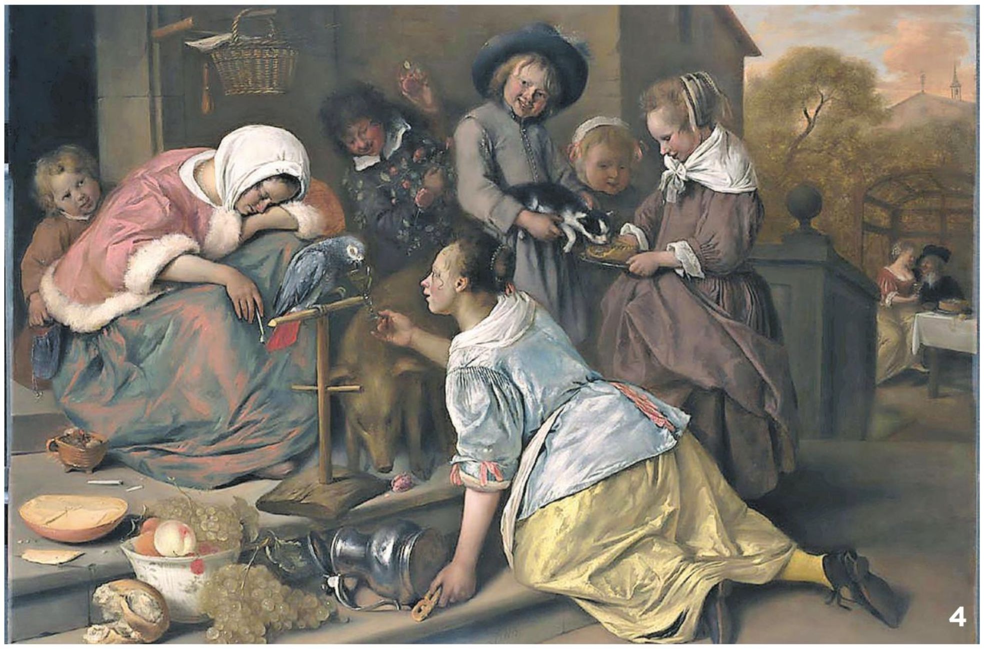

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INDECENT TEMPTATIONS:
1 Bronzino's *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid,* (c. 1545)

2 *Repent, and Sin No More! (Positive and Negative),* by Andy Warhol (1985-86)

3 *The Scapegoat*, by William Holman Hunt (1854-55)

4 *The Effects of Intemperance*, Jan Steen (c. 1663-5)

Credits: The National Gallery, London/ Manchester Art Gallery/Bridgeman Images/2020 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc./ Licensed by DACS, London

EUROFILE ART

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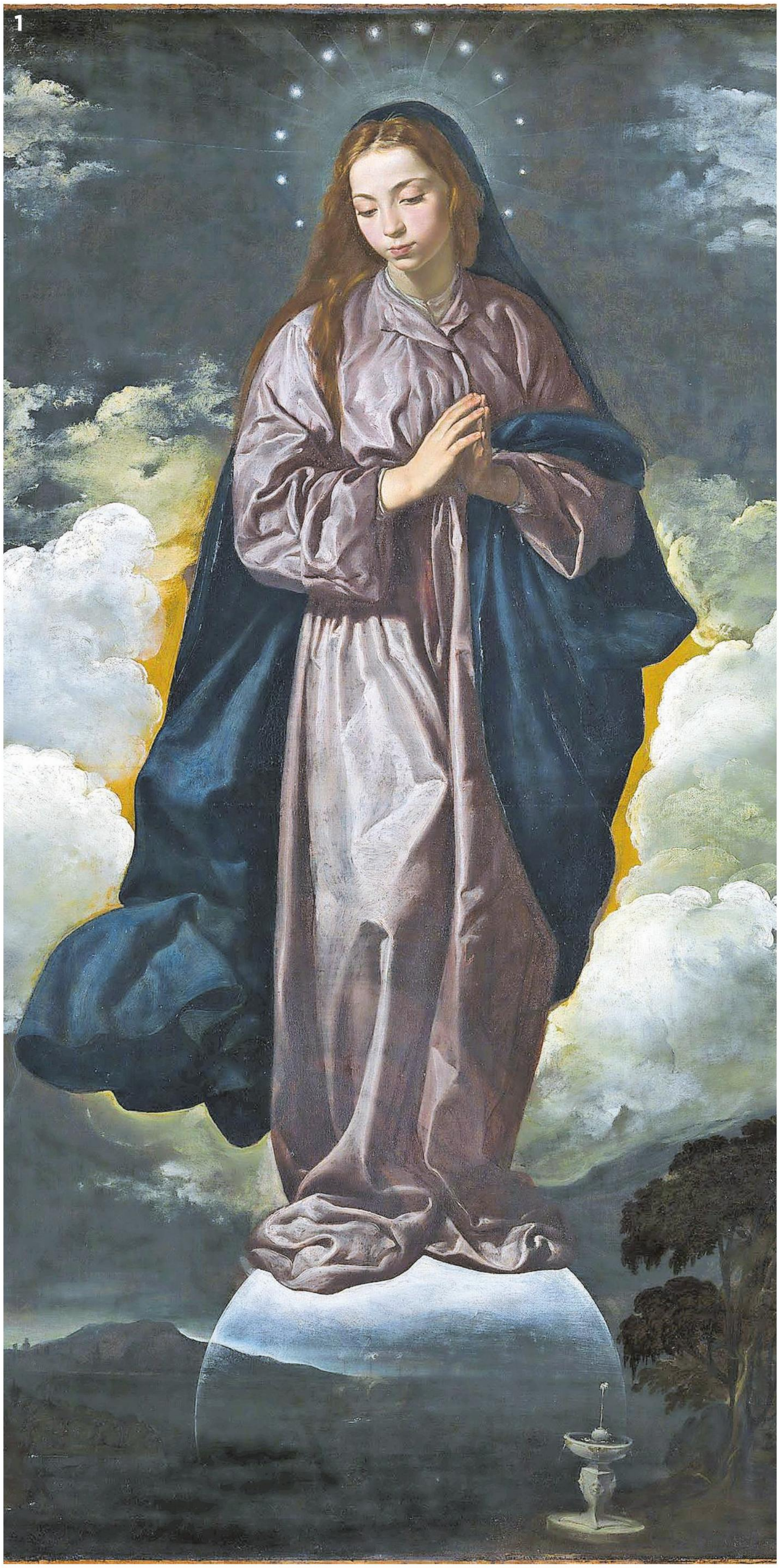

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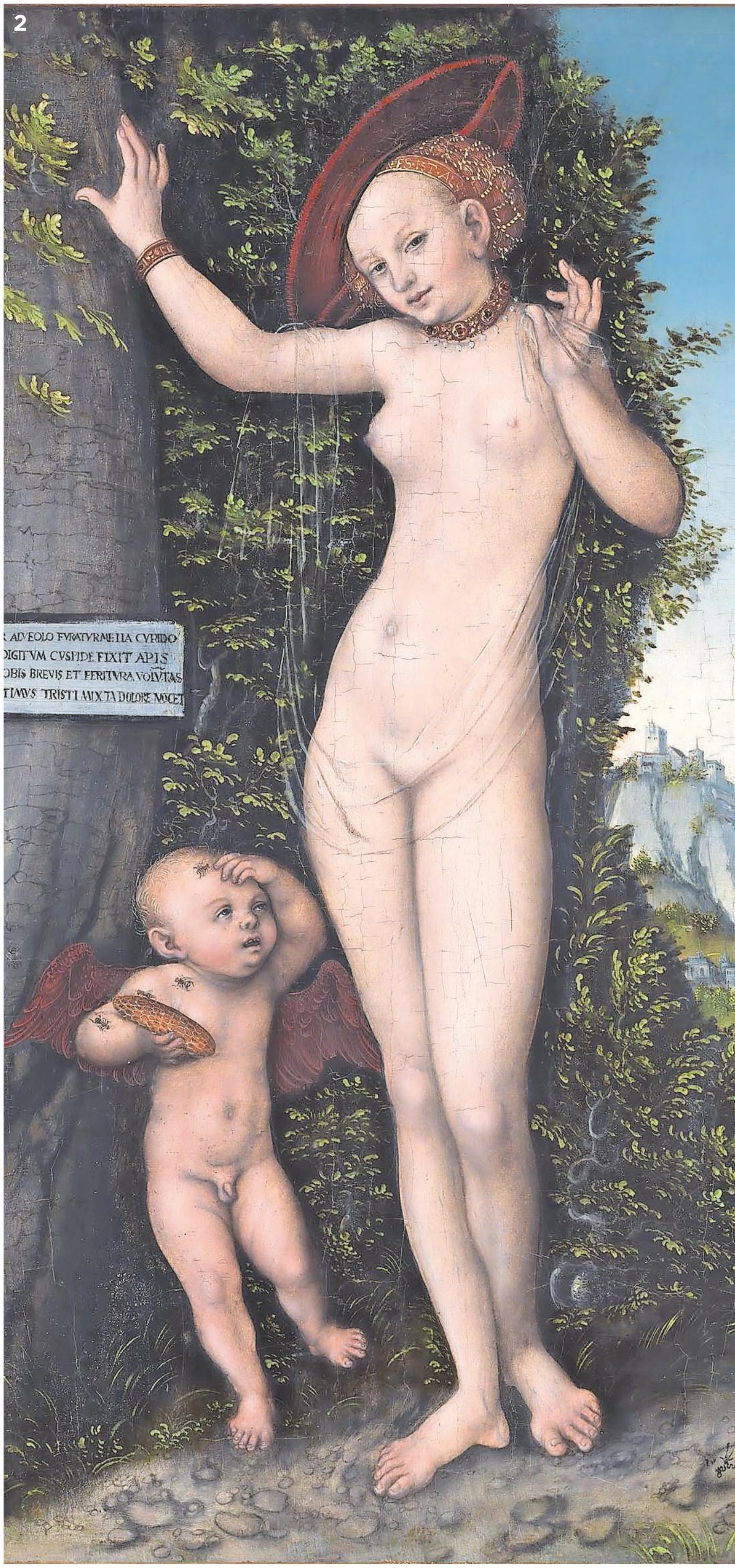
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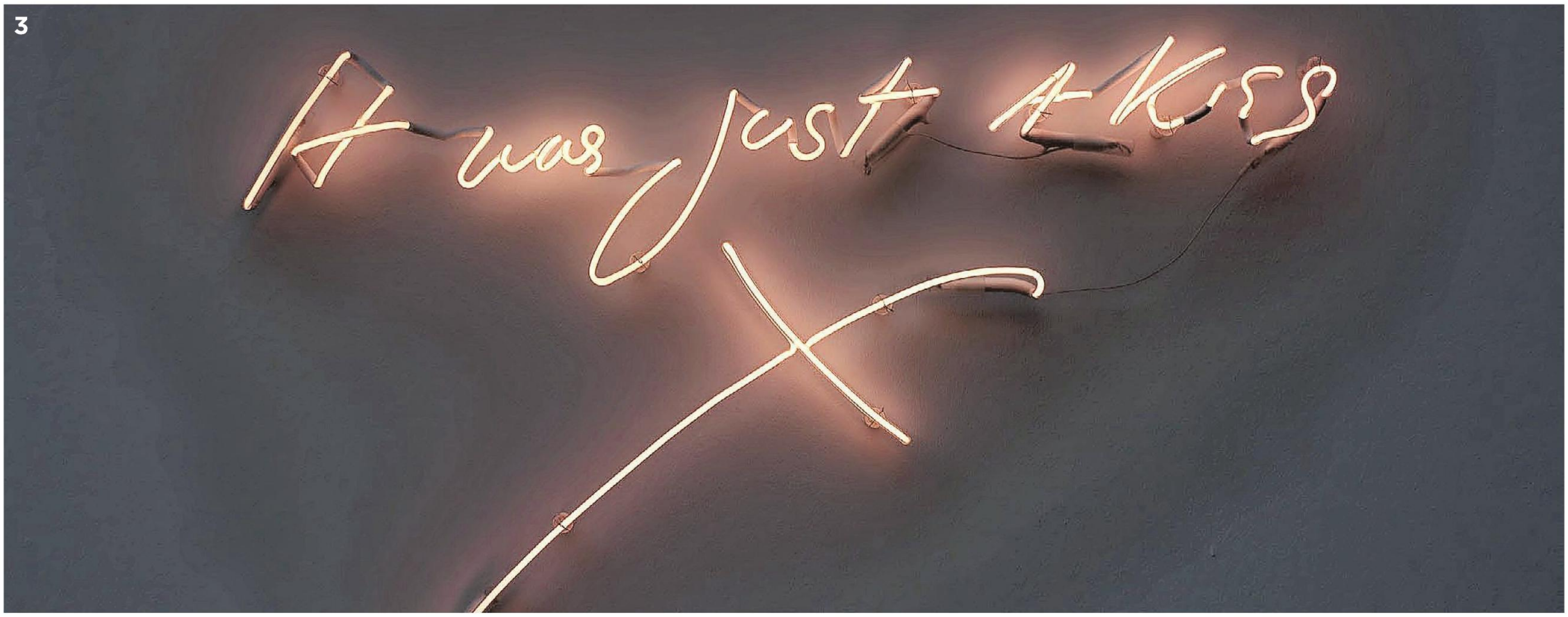
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It was just a kiss
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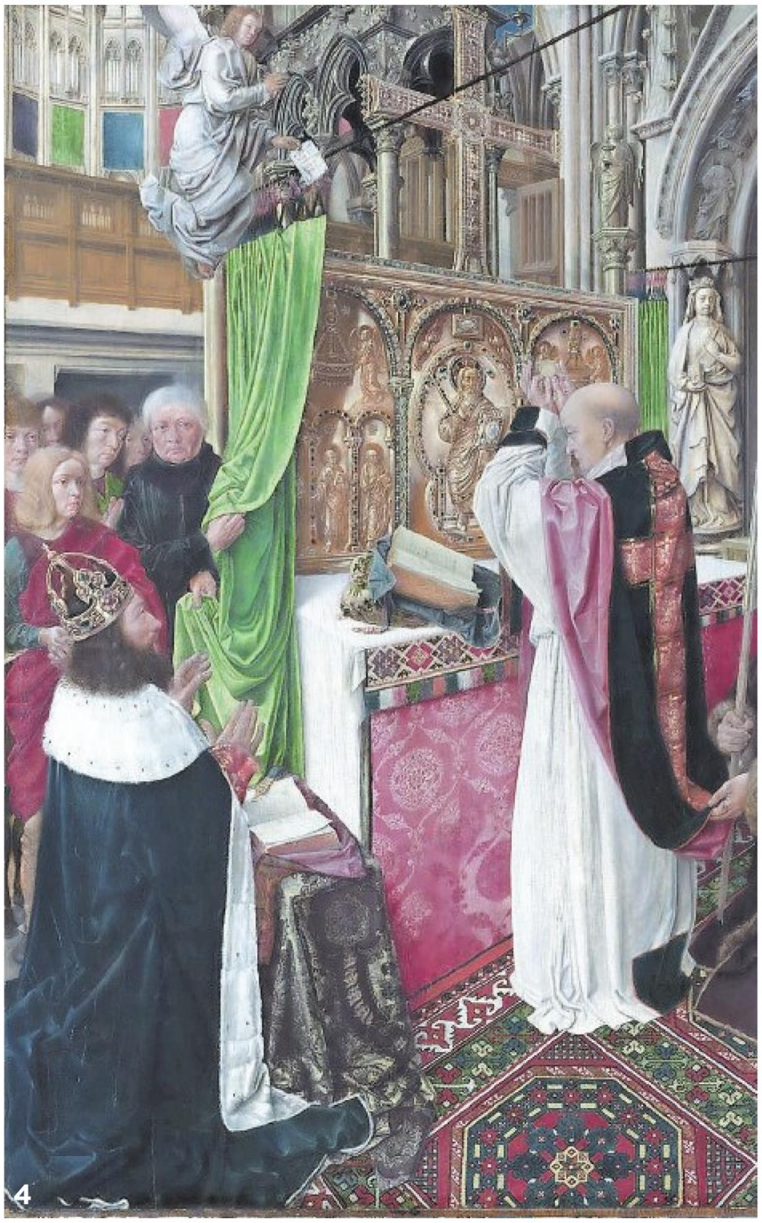


DIFFERENT APPROACHES:
1 Diego Velázquez, *The Immaculate Conception* (1618-19)

2 *Venus and Cupid*, Lucas Cranach the Elder (1529)

3 *It was just a kiss*, Tracey Emin (2010)

4 *The Mass of Saint Giles, Master of Saint Giles* (c. 1500)

Credits: The National Gallery, London/ Tracey Emin. All rights reserved, DACS/ Artimage 2020. Image courtesy the artist

From page 34

he has just awoken from his own "uncouth dream".

The serpent glides down the tree towards them, an Iago whispering in their ears, while around them a menagerie of God's creatures; stags, lions and wild boars.

The tame animals appear in pairs; two partridges and two deer which represent chastity and monogamy.

One only needs to compare Cranach's *Adam and Eve* with Jan Brueghel the Elder's *Garden of Eden* to find shared themes.

Though Brueghel was influenced by the Roman Catholic Church and Cranach was close to Luther they both emphasise the beauty and variety of God's creation and dramatise the moment sin destroyed Eden's purity.

Breughel painted more than 100 works on the theme of paradise which earned him the soubriquet 'Paradise Breughel' and here Adam and Eve are almost lost from sight, far away in the woodland distance, as if they have been banished already.

The animals, however, exist in a harmonious relationship to each other and each has a symbolic meaning. Lions represent the power of God, a horse signifies courage or generosity, a swan or a white duck symbolise purity but a brown duck like the one in the painting might be possessed by an evil spirit.

A peacock represents the resurrection, everlasting life and incorruptibility.

If the sinners are contrasted with the innocence of the animal kingdom, Bronzino's *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid* might, with all its fleshy carnality, appear to be a celebration of lust rather than a condemnation of that all-pervading sin. What are we to make of it?

The National Gallery's own website is enthusiastic – almost indecently so – in its description of the painting: "Venus, goddess of love, steals an arrow from her son Cupid's quiver as she kisses him on the lips. Cupid fondles Venus' breast, his bare buttocks provocatively thrust out as he returns her kiss and attempts to steal her crown."

It is a summary which would not have been well received in 1860 when the gallery first acquired the work. It was judged a "most improper picture" and a restorer was instructed to conceal Venus's tongue entering her son's mouth and to remove the erect nipple between Cupid's groping fingers.

Yet the rampant pair are surrounded by admonitory images which show the dangers of illicit love. A nude child representing Pleasure showers the pair with rose petals unaware that his foot has been pierced by a rose thorn, Deceit, while the head of a girl but the body of a creature offers Venus a honeycomb, hiding the sting in her tail with her other hand. Behind the lustful Cupid, a malevolent figure which could represent jealousy or perhaps syphilis.

It's a sexy picture and one to be enjoyed as such but it is also fiercely moralising – "an extraordinary puzzle," says Dr Joustra – and quite a contrast to the uncomfortable reality of Dutch painter Jan Steen's *The Effects of Intemperance* (c. 1665).

A drunken women is slumped on the steps of her house, a flagon of wine overturned and empty in front of her. It is a scene of chaos and hopelessness.

She is oblivious to the noisy children around her, her pipe is just about to slide from her fingers on to her dress which also rests perilously close to a brazier.

Bizarrely, a young women on her knees is offering a parrot a glass of wine and in the background a man is canoodling with a buxom wench. Her husband perhaps. Her degradation is complete.

It's hard to imagine salvation coming her way but in *Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery* by the father of Jan Brueghel, Pieter the Elder, redemption is at hand.

The pharisees surround Christ and test him with the challenge. "Master, this woman was taken in adultery. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?"

Turn to page 38

From page 37

The imagery is bleak, the figures in grisaille, the vitreous pigment used in colouring glass which creates a stony grey effect, with figures as ghostly as apparitions from beyond the grave.

They are as implacable in their condemnation of the woman as they are in their challenge to Christ. On his knees he traces with his finger in the dust: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." He is defiant in his forgiveness of the sinful woman but he is weighed down by the hostility of his critics and by the burden of his inevitable fate.

There is no hope of forgiveness for any of the dissolute players in William Hogarth's satire *Marriage A-la-Mode*. In the second of six pictures *The Tête à Tête* continues the scandalous story of a disastrous marriage of convenience between a wasteful aristocrat's son and the daughter of a social climber.

We see the husband, clearly nursing a hangover, who has returned from a night in gaming houses and brothels. A dog sniffs at a scented cap belonging to a prostitute or his mistress and he sports a black mark on his neck which suggests he has caught syphilis.

The wife is indifferent. She gives her useless husband a sly look as she stretches out her arms, as if preening with self-satisfaction. She might be pregnant, she might herself have been romancing another. It's typically Hogarthian. A cynical spectacle of sin. Un-pure and simple.

Tracey Emin's neon *It was just a kiss* is more subtle than its simple design suggests. Is it justification of an illicit moment, a lament that a kiss did not go far enough, or a dismissive aside?

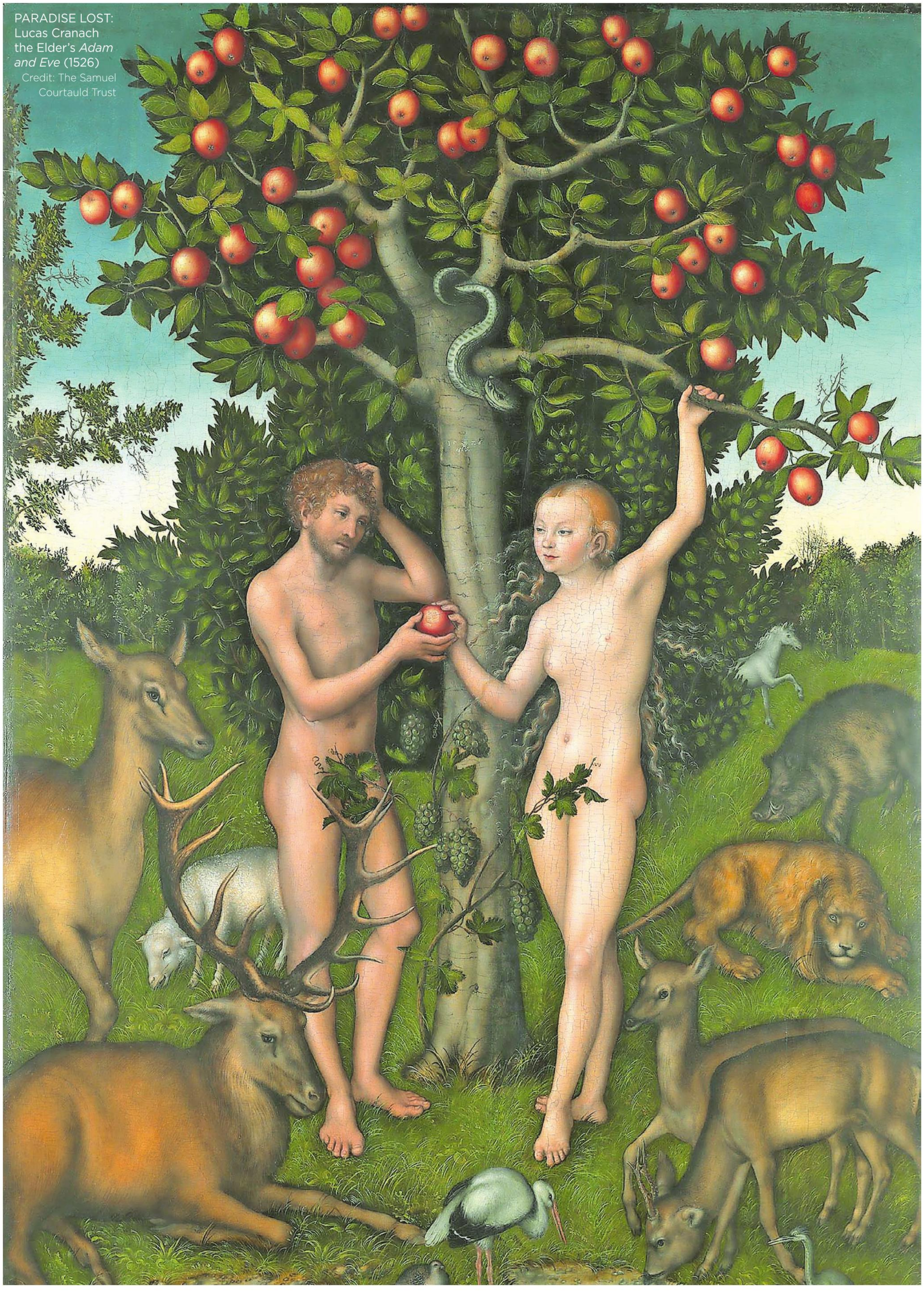
The catalogue suggests that "it could also be related to the story of Christ betrayed by Judas with betrayal coming by a kiss. Just a kiss!" but somehow it feels more of an excuse than a confession.

What is missing from the exhibition, whether in Emin's slight piece or even the heavily-freighted symbolism of Cranach and Brueghel, are images of sin's inevitable bed fellow – at least as far as the Bible goes – revenge, punishment and destruction.

There is no scattering of the builders of the Tower of Babel, no destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah or the plagues visited on ancient Egypt for the persecution of the Israelites – the storm of frogs, a plague of locusts, the thunderstorms of hail and fire.

But it is tempting to think of today's 'plague', the Covid-19 pandemic, in those terms and ask whether such images would be represented if the show was in the planning stage now. "I would have definitely avoided it," says Dr Joustra. "People make those connections (between sin and punishment) quite quickly but I think we should be very careful making them. To say that this has happened for a reason – we should avoid that kind of thinking. But I do think it shows how our thought process works when it comes to such subjects and how it has done for all times. That's what I find so interesting about the subject. Sin has shaped our history and our thinking in such a profound way."

■ *Sin*, at the National Gallery, has been postponed; *Sin, The Art of Transgression* is available from the gallery online book shop



PARADISE LOST: Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Adam and Eve* (1526)

Credit: The Samuel Courtauld Trust

A COMEBACK FOR CANNED LAUGHTER?

It has a controversial reputation, but lockdown TV should make us re-evaluate the unloved laughter track, says **CHARLIE WATTS**

CONTROVERSIAL: Jerry Seinfeld speaks to the studio audience during recording of his hit TV show *Seinfeld*, 1993. NBC insisted that *Seinfeld* used a live audience and a laugh track

Photo: Getty Images

I don't know about you, but I could do with a laugh at the moment. Any opportunity to watch an entertaining television comedy show could prove the tonic we all need. It might be one of the crucial things to help us see through a very strange period.

However, there is a problem. TV shows and situation comedies are usually broadcast in front of mass audiences, and with this now denied, are the empty chairs and lack of atmosphere going to ruin the experience? 'Canned laughter', a divisive and often misunderstood tool, might just help.

The term canned laughter is often attributed to American sound engineer Charley Douglass who devised the technique in the late 1950s.

Audiences are unpredictable, they often laugh at the wrong time and sometimes not at all. Douglass got around this in pre-recorded shows by editing and adjusting the recorded laughter, and by repositioning it in just the right places.

Douglass was keen to perfect the method, and is also credited for creating the 'Laff Box' – a device that allowed a collection of recorded reactions to be falsely inserted into a show.

With each press of the button and burst of recorded laughter, audiences at home felt strangely compelled to laugh along. Sophie Scott a professor of neuroscience at UCL, explains that "adding laughter to a joke, increases the humour value, no matter how funny or unfunny the joke is".

Scott and her researchers created an experiment using canned laughter and 'dad jokes' to make their point. Famously bad, participants found themselves tittering even at the worst ones.

While Douglass may have pioneered a device to please television executives the world over, however, audiences were slowly becoming aware that the laughter was fake.

Novelist and scriptwriter Michael J. Buchanan-Dunne, suggests that although canned laughter continued to be used through the 1960s and 1970s, "[it] did not have enough range to authentically convey such a complex human emotion, therefore when it was used it lacked subtlety, spontaneity, naturalism and quite often logic".

For a while though the insertion of fake laughter meant writers and producers were guaranteed a response to the material whether it was good or not.

INVENTOR: Sound engineer Charles Douglass created canned laughter in the 1950s

Photo:Wikimedia

Buchanan-Dunne says that canned laughter is not used any more, despite many (TV critics included) thinking that it still is. A 30-minute comedy show with a live audience takes hours to be recorded, and the audience is worked hard for their reaction. If anything ends up sounding false these days it is simply because of audience exhaustion. Many shows are recorded 'as-live', to be slightly edited and honed for broadcast later. This can lead to a slightly unnatural quality in the sound of the laughs that begin or cut off at the right moment, with everyone laughing perfectly in unison. The original intention of Douglass, with precise sound manipulation, lives on.

Channel 4 show, *The Last Leg*, a live comedy show that dares to find laughs from weekly topical events, was one of the first to brave the new territory of playing to an empty audience.

It's difficult getting laughs from the pandemic, but *The Last Leg* gave it their best shot and made a Laff Box a very visible part of the show.

With host Adam Hill in charge of a series of buttons assigned to laughs, clapping, groans, and cricket sounds, for any jokes that fell flat. It felt like business as usual with laughs a plenty – even when jokes were met with the cricket sounds.

The same cannot be said for the BBC show *Have I Got News For You*, which felt lost. Without the fullness of audience participation, the topical news quiz show comes across as little more than a celebrity video conference.

They've had little choice but to put the show on in isolation and it doesn't matter how charismatic the host, it could do with something extra to help it fare better.

If recorded laughter is indeed going to return temporarily to our screens, it's an unenviable choice facing programme producers whether to use it or not. Whatever the case, present circumstances mean we are going to need entertaining shows, and we're going to need laughter, real or canned.

■ Charlie Watts is a principal lecturer at the University of Portsmouth; this article also appears at theconversation.com

A CANNED HISTORY

From its earliest days, canned laughter has been a controversial technique. Actor and producer David Niven sniffed in a 1955 interview: "The laugh track is the single greatest affront to public intelligence I know of, and it will never be foisted on any audience of a show I have some say about."

Nevertheless, television bosses in both the US and UK were very attached to it. Even 1960s cartoons such as *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons* used laugh tracks, even though no one was under the illusion that a human audience had watched the filming. *The Muppet Show* became perhaps the first to use a laugh track to semi-artistic effect in the 1970s, simulating an audience for its puppets.

In the same decade, Larry Gelbart, co-creator of the war comedy M*A*S*H, wanted his show to air without laughs. But he didn't prevail over TV executives, who insisted on canned laughter.

In 1981, the producers of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* recorded a laugh track to appease the BBC, but dropped it right before broadcast.

***Splitting Image* filmed its first episode with a studio audience at the insistence of broadcaster ITV, then ditched it too.**

Others also began to resist canned laughter, but it carried on into the 1990s. Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld, co-creators of the biggest American comedy hit of that decade, *Seinfeld,* were forced by their network to keep a studio audience, and thus a laugh track, despite David's protests.

The advent of darker comedies, such as The Office and David's *Curb Your Enthusiasm* – which relied more on cringes than belly laughs – saw more shows abandon their laughter tracks.

THE TWO TOTEMS OF Tokyo

A CITY IN MUSIC

SOPHIA DEBOICK explores the musical heritage of the Japanese capital through two of its most enchanting talents

Tokyo – a kaleidoscope of neon and skyscrapers – was a megacity even in the 18th century, when the population of the city then known as Edo topped one million, 50 years before London reached that milestone. With the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the Japanese capital shifted from Kyoto to Tokyo, and the opening up of the country to the West began. On the eve of the Pacific War, Tokyo had a major airport and international sea port, and rivalled New York in size and ambition.

After the untold devastation of the war, Tokyo was the centre of Japan's economic miracle, and by the tech-forward 1980s it was a modern metropolis on the scale of science fiction. Despite economic travails since, Tokyo maintains its image as a hyper-modern, seething capital today. It is the only place in the world that could possibly have a gargantuan pedestrian crossing – the famously teaming Shibuya intersection – as a tourist attraction, and Tokyo's love for extremes is reflected culturally too.

The shadows of the hedonistic *ukiyo* demimonde of the Edo period are seen in the iconic facets of Tokyo's consumer culture, from the elaborate street styles of the Harajuku neighbourhood to the joyous self-indulgence of karaoke.

Today Japan is one of the largest music markets in the world, and from the country's ancient folk music to the J-pop juggernaut of today, Tokyo has long been the heart of the country as a musical titan. But it is the city's native musicians who have broken through to the western consciousness who have had most impact on music globally, influencing musicians, and indeed whole genres, and just two prominent artists have shown how being a Tokyoite can be associated with an unbounded probing of the limits.

Yoko Ono was born in Tokyo in 1933, equidistant between the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923 that levelled great swathes of Tokyo and killed thousands in the firestorms that followed, and the heavy bombing of 1944-45 which set the city ablaze once again. Born to a family with aristocratic roots and a banker father who was a former concert pianist, Ono benefitted from attending exclusive schools and a classical training in piano and singing.

War ended this charmed life at a stroke. The devastating bombing of Tokyo of early March 1945 that killed 100,000 forced the family out to the countryside where the 12-year-old Ono had to barter the family's belongings for food. Back at school in Tokyo in 1946, Ono witnessed the complete degradation of the city's people in the wake of Japan's defeat, resulting in a deep pacifism which many mocked in the years to come but few fully understood.

Ono's teens were spent in a society that faced rebuilding itself from scratch, and where huge social change was accompanied by a creative renaissance in music and cinema. From the emergence of *Kayokyoku* (western-influenced pop music), to Kurosawa's first major works, these were years as remarkable as they were grindingly hard. When a 20-year-old Ono joined her family in upmarket Scarsdale, New York, she brought the indelible influence of the experience of post-war Tokyo to bear as she studied music, became involved in the Fluxus movement and was mentored by John Cage.

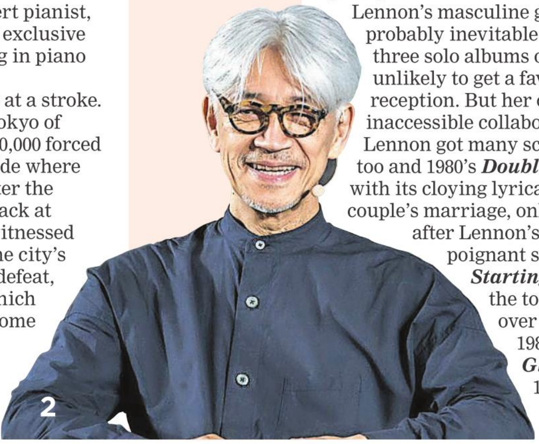
ORIGINAL THINKING:
1 A flashmob perform to Yellow Magic Orchestra's Rydeen in Tokyo, 2013
Photo: Getty Images

2 YMO's Ryuichi Sakamoto
Photo: WireImage

3 Yoko Ono
Photo: Getty Images

Ono's powerful performance piece which she debuted in Tokyo, ***Cut Piece*** (1964) – where she sat immobile as audience members cut chunks from her clothing – had made her name in the art world, but her musical career attracted still more controversy. The highly experimental musical collage that was ***Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins*** (1968), the first of three such DIY albums made with John Lennon, was Ono's musical debut. Albums made under the Plastic Ono Band moniker followed, bearing Ono's trademark ululating vocals, influenced both by traditional Japanese Kabuki theatre and primal scream therapy.

Given the overt feminism of much of Ono's art and music, the misogynist perception of her as a corruptor of Lennon's masculine genius was probably inevitable and made her three solo albums of the early 1970s unlikely to get a favourable reception. But her often highly inaccessible collaborations with Lennon got many sceptical reviews too and 1980's ***Double Fantasy*** (1980), with its cloying lyrical focus on the couple's marriage, only gained acclaim after Lennon's murder, when its poignant single ***(Just Like) Starting Over*** went to the top of the charts all over the world. Ono's 1981 ***Season of Glass*** was a 14-track dissection of her grief, but in the following years, her output proliferated in directions other than professional widowhood.



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On the eve of her fifties, Ono somewhat improbably became a successful singles artist, with ***Walking on Thin Ice*** (1981) and ***Hell in Paradise*** (1985) both hitting the Billboard Hot 100. These were among the songs remixed by the Pet Shop Boys, Moby and others in the 2000s, resulting in five Billboard Dance or Club Play chart No. 1s.

The remix project demonstrated Ono's refusal to stand still, and five solo albums and multiple artistic projects had appeared in the intervening period, while the collaboration with much younger artists continued, not least on 2013's ***Take Me to the Land of Hell***, released for her 80th birthday.

When Ono was retrospectively given a co-writing credit on ***Imagine*** in 2017, it was a vindication for someone so often called a charlatan, although a *Rolling Stone* review of 1971's ***Fly*** LP probably got it right in pointing out her inability to distinguish "what is first-rate and what is not", putting out vast amounts of material indiscriminately. Her fearlessness has been both her greatest strength and her greatest weakness, and despite the focus on her years with Lennon, Ono's substance should perhaps rather be seen in her formative years in Tokyo, living in a society in complete free-fall, where everything was possible.

In 1952, the year Ono became the first woman admitted to study philosophy at Tokyo's Gakushuin University, Ryuichi Sakamoto was born in the city. A man whose illustrious career has ranged from electronic music pioneer to concert hall-filling pianist, Sakamoto came from a similarly privileged and cultured milieu, even attending one of the same schools as Ono, but his experience of the city was very different.

Japan was by then on the way to recovering economic growth at pre-war levels and the Korean War had rehabilitated the pariah state as a strategic ally against communism. When Sakamoto was 12, Tokyo took the world

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NEW EUROPEAN: TOKYO

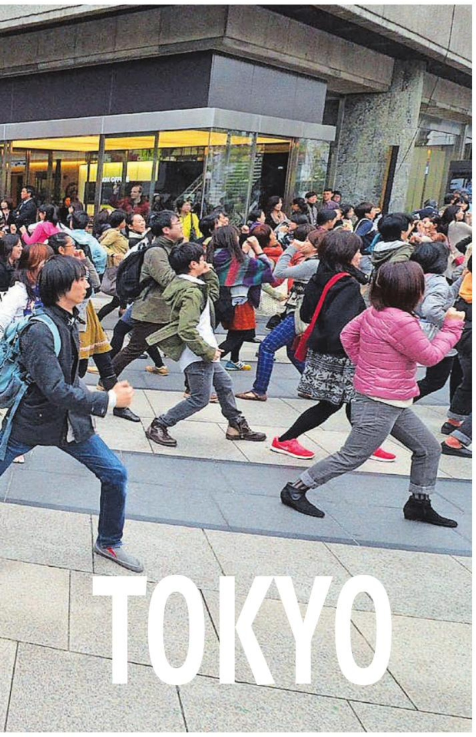
Featuring:

Why
Yoko Ono

Hell in Paradise
Yoko Ono/Moby

Firecracker
Yellow Magic Orchestra

Tokyo Story
Ryuichi Sakamoto



stage as Olympic host, and the futuristic Shinkansen bullet train was unveiled as a symbol of the new Japan.

For the classically trained, adolescent Sakamoto, the future had already arrived in the shape of the Beatles and the Stones. But his love of Debussy, studies in composition and ethnomusicology at the Tokyo University of the Arts, and stints in free jazz and folk bands meant Sakamoto brought a dizzying mix of influences to the table when he formed the electronic trio Yellow Magic Orchestra with Yukihiro Takahashi and Haruomi Hosono in 1978, and the trio began to make their own designs on the future with what Hosono called the "music of the next century".

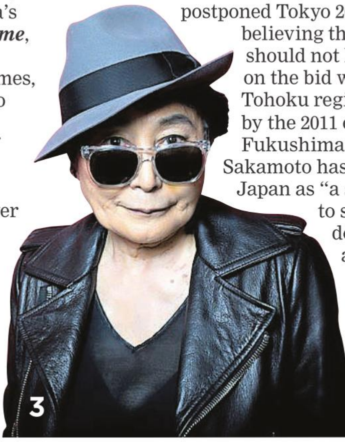
Taking the lessons of Kraftwerk and spiking it with a playful exploration of concepts of 'the mystic east', Yellow Magic Orchestra made upbeat, whimsical songs using the cutting-edge musical technologies that most of their fellow synth-obsessives in Britain associated only with a certain European urban gloom. But Yellow Magic Orchestra were not just pivotal for electronic music – they also made a major contribution to the primordial soup of hip-hop and techno, as well as all but inventing chiptune (using arcade and console gaming machine sound chips to make music).

Yellow Magic Orchestra's 1979 single ***Computer Game***, sampling the music of a number of early video games, rather improbably went to No.17 in the UK and sold hundreds of thousands of copies in America. In December 1980 they performed their witty cover of American 'father of exotica' Martin Denny's ***Firecracker on Soul Train***, thoroughly reclaiming this bit of orientalist kitsch. Afrika Bambaataa used the track on his famed *Death Mix* (1983), a seminal moment for hip hop, while Sakamoto's solo track ***Riot In Lagos*** (1980) anticipated techno.

As that decade wore on, Sakamoto began to emerge as a potential international pop star. He kicked off a long career in film music via *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence* (1983), in which he starred as a Japanese prisoner of war camp commandant opposite David Bowie, revealing the kind of androgynous beauty that had made Bowie an icon. Sakamoto's synth-laden score for this tale of violence and shame was full of painful poignancy and the single with Japan's David Sylvian based on the main theme, ***Forbidden Colours***, was a UK Top 20 hit. The soundtrack for *The Last Emperor* (1987) won Sakamoto and his collaborator David Byrne an Oscar.

In the 1990s, Sakamoto returned to his classical piano training, culminating in 1999 with his lush single ***Energy Flow*** from the album ***BTTB ('Back To The Basics')***. It became the first instrumental track ever to achieve a No.1 in Japan, and Sakamoto has moved in ever more sparse and minimalist directions, along with doing more scoring work, including for last year's Black Mirror episode *Smithereens*. Sakamoto has charted a course between pushing the boundaries and technical precision (his Yellow Magic Orchestra bandmates refer to him as 'the professor') that few other artists have even attempted.

Despite writing music for the opening ceremony of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, Sakamoto poured cold water on the idea of contributing to the now postponed Tokyo 2020 Olympics, believing the Japanese state should not have expended energy on the bid when thousands in the Tohoku region were still displaced by the 2011 earthquake and Fukushima disaster. While Sakamoto has described today's Japan as "a society where it's hard to say things that others don't agree with", adding "You won't get original thinking in an environment like that", in the past Tokyo has proved itself a place where defiantly creative musical minds have been made.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MUSIC IN THE KEY OF KABUKI

Kabuki flourished in the red-light district of Edo before the first Kabuki theatre – the Saruwakaza – opened in the city in 1624. An art form combining theatre and music (the three characters ka, bu, and ki signify 'song', 'dance' and 'skill'), its nagauta lyric music was based on ancient Noh theatre music, with singing, the three-stringed samisen, drums and flute. But the costuming and physical performance of Kabuki has been as influential as its music, echoed in the style of seminal rockers X Japan, the distinctive facepaint of metallers, from Tokyo's own Seikima-II to KISS, and David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust costumes by the Tokyo-based designer Kansai Yamamoto.

STAR TURNS
BY TIM WALKER

LAUGHING ALL THE WAY TO THE BANK

There are certain parts – and Dracula is one of them – that require of the actor playing them some sense of being in on the joke with film-goers. Christopher Lee never saw anything funny about what was only ever a job to him. If anything horrified him, it was a giggling stranger coming up to his wife Gitte in the street and asking if she was "the bride of Dracula".

He felt that insulted him every bit as much as her. I recall him telling me how he'd reminded this funster that he hadn't played the Transylvanian blood-sucker in decades. An actor can move on – and, of course, Lee did with parts in the *James Bond*, *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* franchises – but often the fans can't, not least in because in his case the old Hammer horrors are still a regular staple of late night television.

Lee's occasional co-stars Peter Cushing and Vincent Price took the ribbing in good part, but that wasn't for Lee. Maybe it was because they'd a come from a traditional stage background they had a more natural empathy with ordinary punters. Maybe, too, Lee's wartime experiences attached to the SAS and SOE as an RAF liaison officer – when he'd often have to make decisions about whether people lived or died – had also left their mark.

Within the acting profession, Lee was often seen as stand-offish and remote. The easy-going Roger Moore was intrigued by him when they'd appeared together in *The Man With the Golden Gun*. Although Moore liked him, he admitted he couldn't help but tease a man who was so deadly earnest. The crew on *The Far Pavilions* struggled not to guffaw when, in the middle of a scene, Rupert Everett's horse had attempted to mount Lee's, and, in the ensuing melee, first the wig Lee was wearing for the part came off and then his own wig, which no one was supposed to know about.

During the making of *The Three Musketeers*, Lee's co-star Oliver Reed had secretly spiked his orange juice with vodka. A few glasses had rendered Lee insensible. He told Reed the next day that what he had done was unprofessional and refused to talk to him for some time. My guess is Reed was just trying to get him to loosen up a bit, but, when I got to know Lee around the turn of the millennium, I soon worked out that was never going to happen.

It was probably Lee's sense of utter conviction in his all-too-often preposterous films that had made him a hero of mine as I was growing up. After I'd done an interview with him – when he'd joked I seemed to remember a lot more about his career than he did – he was happy to meet for a series of lunches at Le Caprice and his club, Buck's. He was then in his eighties, but his work – or, more to the point, his income stream – mattered to him as much as ever.

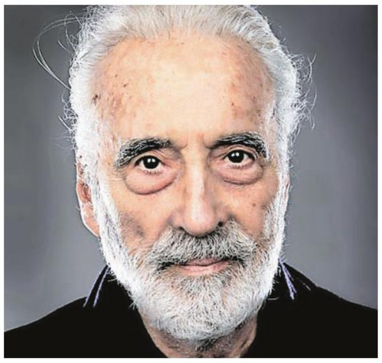

GREAT SURVIVOR: Christopher Lee, 2014

Photo: Getty Images

Occasionally he'd admit to disappointments – if only he'd got the part of the old butler in *The Remains of the Day* and he regretted turning down the role Leslie Nielsen ended up making his own in the *Airplane* films – but, mostly, he had run his career with an almost infallible business acumen.

He could be almost chillingly detached about it, such as when his name began to appear before Cushing's in the opening credits to their later films together. Lee said simply that he'd asked his agent to fix it for him as he felt he had become the better-known star. He added that Cushing's wife Helen had registered her displeasure, but his old friend never mentioned it.

In the 1970s, when Cushing loyally kept appearing in increasingly ropey films for Hammer, Lee saw there was no use staying in Britain, where the industry was starting to go into sharp decline, and decamped to Los Angeles. It turned out to be a typically canny move and a part in *Airport '77* turned out to be the first in a remunerative series of blockbusters.

Lee eventually came back to Britain – residing in some style near Sloane Square in London – and a knighthood ensued. His fellow actors might not have been so sure he deserved it – Dame Eileen Atkins felt such honours ought to be the preserve of theatre luminaries – but Lee got to have the last laugh. He was still working when he died in 2015 at the age of 93 and had probably made more money than any actor of his generation. What no one could ever deny is that he was one of the great survivors.

WALKING IS WHAT I MISS MOST IN LOCKDOWN.. BY A DISTANCE

With the virus restrictions preventing more than a brief daily stroll, **CHARLIE CONNELLY** goes in search of books that provide a bit more of a sense of journey

THE GREAT OUTDOORS:
1 Walkers on a footpath in the Eskdale valley in the Lake District, 1960

2 French writer Xavier De Maistre

Photos: Getty Images

I miss walking. I mean, I get out once a day for a mooch about but it's the same short route every time, nodding at the same people from two metres away, seeing the same cracks in the same paving stones and the same crisp packet jammed into the same bench.

It's a small price to pay, and one I'm very happy to keep forking out until things can return to as close to normal as they'll ever be. I'm healthy, people close to me are healthy and my local supermarket shows no sign of running out of scotch eggs or Frazzles any time soon. Things could be, by some distance, a great deal worse, but that doesn't change the fact that some distance is what I miss.

Walking is good for the mind and good for the body. My mental health has never been better than the time I walked the length of England, north to south. Setting out at dawn every morning not knowing where I'd be sleeping that night, walking beneath big skies that brought with them all the elements meteorology had to offer and the delights of serendipity in meeting people and seeing things I never would have otherwise: I struggle to think of a happier time. And by the end my calves could have deflected artillery shells.

My current two-mile daily circuit is certainly better than nothing and I'm grateful for it but I can't wait to be able to pull on my boots and set off for a Sunday yomp, or a Saturday morning on which I can catch a train to somewhere two days' walk away and be home in time for the *Antiques Roadshow*.

Instead I find myself turning to my bookshelves for some ambulatory solace that can transport me further than my government-approved constitutionals. Now that anything farther than the Post Office is marked "here be dragons", it's literature's itinerants that have to do the walking for me.

There are plenty of non-fiction options. Patrick Leigh Fermor's trilogy of books charting his teenage walk across 1930s Europe from London to Istanbul remains the yardstick for bipedal travel narratives. The first volume *A Time of Gifts*, in which he gets as far as the Danube, is a masterpiece, the sequel *Between the Woods to the Water* takes him across Hungary and Romania, and the posthumously assembled final book *The Broken Road* completes an incredible journey beautifully recorded. Laurie Lee's *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* provides similar balm, starting out almost at the same time as Leigh Fermor with a walk from Gloucestershire to London and then travelling to Spain on the brink of civil war.

"I felt it was for this I had come: to wake at dawn on a hillside and look out on a world for which I had no words, to start at the beginning, speechless and without plan, in a place that still had no memories for me," he wrote.

Fiction writers and poets have long extolled the benefits of walking. Wordsworth was an unstoppable perambulator: Thomas de Quincey estimated that during his lifetime the poet walked 180,000 miles (which works out at a shade under nine miles a day, every day, for his entire adult life, and that in the days before Gore-tex) while Dickens' walking through London, especially at night, inspired some of his finest work.

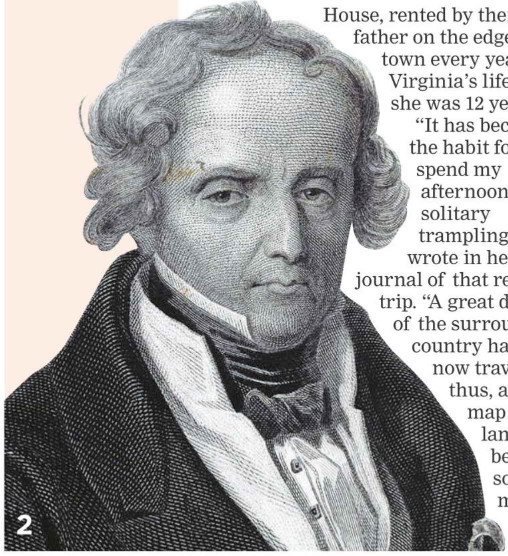
"If I couldn't walk fast and far I should just explode and perish," he said, which would have caused a terrible mess had he ever found himself in lockdown.

Vladimir Nabokov used to cite Stephen Dedalus' and Leopold Bloom's meanderings through a Dublin day in James Joyce's *Ulysses* as the key to understanding the work, not Joyce's philosophical underpinnings.

"Instead of perpetuating the pretentious nonsense of Homeric, chromatic, and visceral chapter headings," he grumbled, "instructors should prepare maps of Dublin with Bloom's and Stephen's intertwining itineraries clearly traced."

He was a man of his word, too, drawing his own map of the pair's peregrinations through the city on June 16, 1904.

> My mental health has never been better than the time I walked the length of England, north to south… I struggle to think of a happier time. And by the end my calves could have deflected artillery shells.



Mrs Dalloway's wanderings through London on her mission to buy flowers for a party have been similarly plotted, with Virginia Woolf another enthusiast for the wonders of walking. In 1905, aged 23, she travelled with her siblings to St Ives where they had enjoyed a number of childhood summers in Talland House, rented by their father on the edge of the town every year of Virginia's life until she was 12 years old.

"It has become the habit for me to spend my afternoons in solitary trampling," she wrote in her journal of that return trip. "A great distance of the surrounding country have I now traversed thus, and the map of the land becomes solid in my brain."

It might have been set on the Isle of Skye but her extraordinary novel *To the Lighthouse*, published in 1927, was all about those childhood holidays, conceived first on those Cornish walks and formed during the frantic perambulations around Bloomsbury Square during which the book formed in her mind "in a great involuntary rush".

Yet for all I was pulling these books off the shelf, reading the back covers, pursing my lips and raising my eyebrows the tome I eventually settled down with in an attempt to replace the thrum of miles in my soles and thighs was a walking odyssey in which the protagonist didn't even go outside.

Xavier de Maistre was born into a French noble family in 1763. He became a soldier in the army of Piedmont-Sardinia, service that in 1790 took him to Turin. We don't know the details but while in Turin de Maistre fought an illegal duel – presumably successfully – for which he was tried and sentenced to 42 days under house arrest.

Did he use his time in domestic solitary confinement to reflect upon his misdeed? No, he did not. Instead he set about

writing *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (‘Journey Around My Room’).

It’s one of those books that’s been on my shelf for years but I’d never got around to. I’d been wary of it because I rather feared it was a work of windy, beard-stroking philosophy, but that was more his brother’s bag. Joseph de Maistre was a counter-revolutionary during the French Revolution and its aftermath, firmly believing – with spectacularly bad timing – that monarchy was a divinely bestowed right and the most effective form of government, while the French Revolution had come about purely because people were not religious enough anymore.

Journey Around My Room is an absolute riot. Written in 42 short chapters, one for each day of de Maistre’s confinement, it’s a grand, sweeping travelogue of a sort becoming popular at the time as explorers traversed the globe discovering new and distant lands. Except de Maistre isn’t going anywhere, treating his incarceration as an epic voyage around his room, visiting the furniture and furnishings within it.

“What more glorious than to open for oneself a new career,” he begins with characteristic understatement, “to appear suddenly before the learned world with a book of discoveries in one’s hand like an un-looked for comet blazing through the empyrean!”

Describing the parameters of his itinerary he informs the reader that, if he stays close to the wall, the longest walk around his room takes 36 steps.

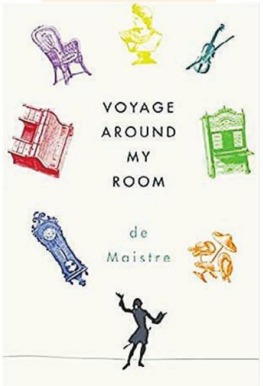
“My journey will, however, be longer than this,” he assures us, “for I shall traverse my room up and down and across, without rule or plan. I shall even zig-zag about, following, if needs be, every possible geometrical line.”

He walks some of it, but also travels, “when not pressed for time”, in his armchair, rocking it back and forth and side to side, setting out for and contemplating such exotic vistas as his bed.

“A bed sees us born and sees us die,” he muses. “It is the ever-changing scene upon which the human race plays by turns interesting dramas, laughable farces and fearful tragedies. It is a cradle decked with flowers. A throne of love. A sepulchre.”

The tone is consistently ironic verging on self-mockery. When he does ruminate upon how enforced solitude enables his mind to separate from his body, he doesn’t labour the point and never spends long in deep introspection. Indeed, he follows a rare maudlin chapter revisiting the death of a friend with a note to say he didn’t really want to include it in the first place and “if anyone thinks I should have omitted this chapter he can tear it from his copy or even throw the whole book on the fire”.

PANDEMIC PERFECTION:: Xavier De Maistre‘s *Voyage Around My Room*



So used does de Maistre become to his enforced solitude that a knock on the door startles him to the extent he falls out of his armchair. He was just about to reach his bureau on the far side of the room too, a major landmark on his epic journey, an incident he likens to a post-chaise turning over on the highway.

Finally, when his six weeks are up and he’s released from domestic captivity and back into the routines of life as it was before, his feelings are more complicated than he’d envisaged.

“I am now free then, or rather, I must enter again into bondage,” he sighs. When lockdown restrictions finally ease and everyday life begins to find its rhythm and routine again, will we come to regard our liberty in similar terms?

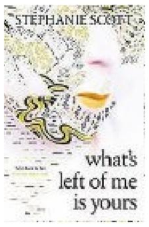
Voyage Around My Room is a short book, a very funny book and, at a time when everyone seems to be devouring Camus’ *The Plague*, the perfect book for the Covid-19 lockdown. Xavier de Maistre could never have thought that 300 years after he wrote it his book would become topical, even useful.

In fact he hadn’t even wanted to publish it at all, it was his brother demonstrating a prescience lacking from his political philosophy who ensured it was turned into a book.

Call it satire, call it the first work of psychogeography, call it a self-help guide for the pandemic generation, Xavier de Maistre’s perambulations around his 36-pace room provide a sobering reminder that you don’t necessarily have to wander far to walk your mind to a happier, healthier place. I’m heading out now with a spring in my step. I hope no-one’s moved that crisp packet.

■ *Voyage Round My Room* by Xavier de Maistre is published by W.W. Norton, price £10.99

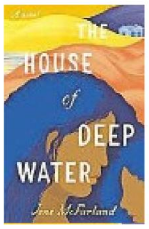
FIVE GREAT BOOKS OUT THIS WEEK



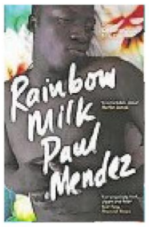
WHAT’S LEFT OF ME IS YOURS
Stephanie Scott (Orion, £14.99)
This debut novel is set in modern-day Tokyo and inspired by true events. In Japan a wakaresaseya (literally a ‘breaker-upper’) is a person hired by one spouse to seduce the other to gain leverage in a divorce settlement. In *What’s Left Of Me Is Yours* the wakaresaseya does his job a little too well and the pair fall in love, triggering a string of violent events that leads a daughter to explore the very notion of love itself.

CATHERINE LACEY
PEW

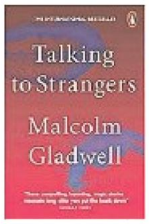
PEW
Catherine Lacey (Granta, £12.99)
Pew wakes up surrounded by curious strangers on a bench in a church in a God-fearing town in the American South. They’ve forgotten their name, forgotten if they’re a girl or a boy. Even their age, race and nationality are indeterminable. What circumstance has brought them there? Bombarded with questions that get louder and louder Pew stays completely silent, a passive act that pulls the threads of an outwardly peaceful community.



THE HOUSE OF DEEP WATER
Jeni Mcfarland (Putnam, £21.99)
River Bend, Michigan, is the kind of small town most can’t imagine leaving, but three women couldn’t wait to escape. When each is compelled to return their paths collide at Beth’s father’s house and secrets re-emerge, changing a town struggling to contain its love affairs and secrets. An evocative account of the fallout when we’re forced to confront a devastating past.



RAINBOW MILK
Paul Mendez (Little, Brown, £14.99).
A debut novel set to make a name for its author, *Rainbow Milk* is tightly-written but wide-ranging exploration of race, sexuality, class and religion set in the Black Country and London. “When did you last read a novel about a young, black, gay, Jehovah’s Witness man from Wolverhampton who flees his community to make his way in London as a prostitute?” asks Booker-winner Bernardine Evaristo.



TALKING TO STRANGERS
Malcolm Gladwell (Penguin, £7.99).
Out in paperback this week, Gladwell’s exploration of the deceit and fatal errors that lead to devastating outcomes asks why we find it hard to detect a lie, read a face or judge the motives of a stranger. Ranging across stories like Sandra Bland, a black woman in America who killed herself in a cell three days after a needless traffic stop to the conviction of Amanda Knox, this is a thought-provoking analysis of the failings of the modern world.

EUROFILE POEM AND PUZZLES

a poem for europe

JOHN WHITE was active reading and writing poetry in the '70s and was published in Michael Horovitz's *New Departures*, before disappearing from view for the duration. He reappeared in 2013 and is currently a Poetry School/Newcastle University Writing Poetry MA student, and can often be heard reading around London.

STRANGERS

I came here in 1949, she said,
I was an au pair. We stayed over there..

A row of houses on the low slate cliff across the beach,
sparser then, greyer. She'd have worn an elegant pleated skirt,
the children over-dressed, boys in long stiff shorts below the knee.
Rationing, some loss in every house:

I was 19 then,
first time away from home..

She grew up in Switzerland, trapped there by Europe's war,
now grey-white hair and thin, still fit enough
to be at home in a rocky North Cornwall bay.
Her two daughters, protective, look like her:

We come here every year,
though we've changed, just like this place..

Three generations follow an elder who began
her life's adventure here. Who loves this place
on Europe's north west coast, far away from land-locked lakes,
where Atlantic waves still beat the rocks beneath a troubled sky:

You wouldn't want to live in England now..

They left Friday.
I meant to ask them in.

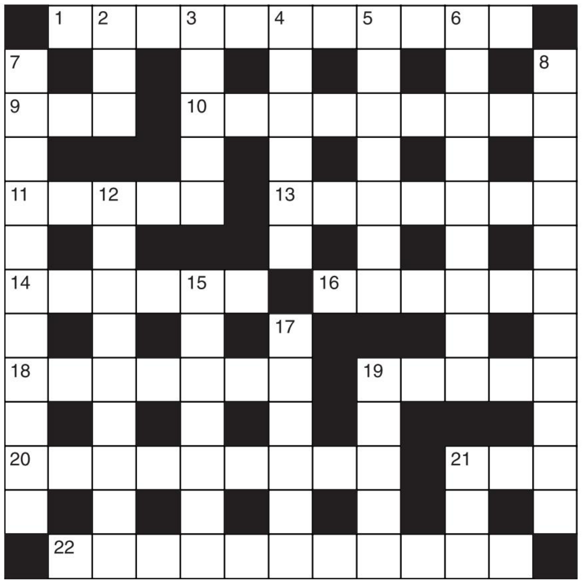
A poem for Europe is edited by Briony Bax, Poetry Editor. Submit your poems to poetryeditor@theneweuropean.co.uk

Cryptic crosswords sponsored by DORMONT ESTATE LIVING IN BALANCE WITH THE ENVIRONMENT www.dormontestate.com

Cryptic 1

Across
1 & 11 Across. Prime collection of old sovereigns (5,4,2,5)
9 Across & 21 Down. It contains the means of reducing friction (3,3)
10. Suddenly a call note is changed (3,2,4)
11. See 1 Across.
13. A figure that is calculated to make the mob rush (7)
14. Strip joint near the street (6)
16. This is thrown from the plane by which mother's returning (6)
18. This is designed to hold one's capital cover (3,4)
19. The fellow holds a note for the builder (5)
20. Profligate without friends (9)
21. Potter's stick (3)
22. The disposition of fellows in almost completely sober surroundings (11)

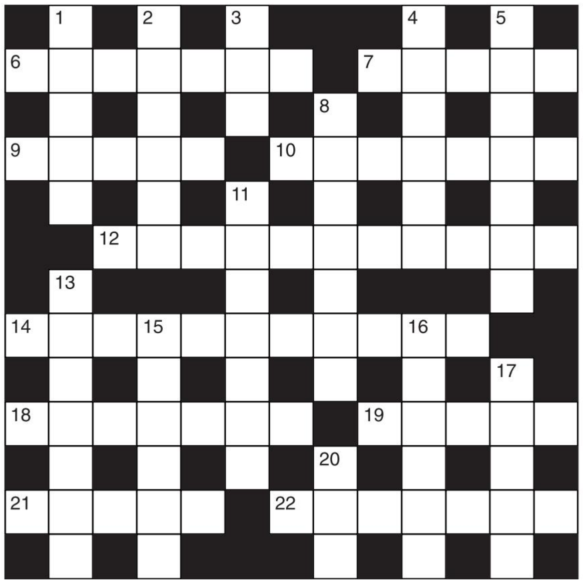
Down
2. Well, this is just the opposite (3)
3. An old-fashioned garment lingers on (5)
4. What to wear for a Spanish dance (6)
5. Unconscious, exhausted, eclipsed (7)
6. Conveyances for the whole works (9)
7. Had the appearance of a principal and was far-seeing (6,5)
8. Linesman (11)
12. What one starting to take orders goes through (9)
15. Leave one's seat and upsets the dustpan (5,2)
17. Less generous, being more lowly bred (6)
19. The woman is frantic the morning after! (5)
21. See 9 Across.



Cryptic 2

Across
6. Refusing to listen to reason, I got put into bed (7)
7. Unofficial receiver (5)
9. I left in a vessel – to guide it? (5)
10. A match for the devil (7)
12. Hat for a hunter (11)
14. What electricians look for in newspapers? (7,4)
18. Getting the feel of things (7)
19. Isle everyone goes round to (5)
21. One goes to the bank for it (5)
22. Succeed with a will in their resolve (7)

Down
1. A number on hand (5)
2. Doctor got up, looking surly (6)
3. In which to spend the rest of your life (3)
4. No answer (6)
5. He plans to no good purpose (7)
8. Is compelled to change a nag for a livelier horse (7)
11. I call round on pressing business (7)
13. Mercy makes one look big (7)
15. Noisy rumour (6)
16. Decline with some hesitation (6)
17. Region without hills, lacking beauty (5)
20. An object to destroy (3)



Crossword solutions

Cryptic 1
Across: 1 First book of; 9 Oil; 10 All at once; 11 Kings; 13 Rhombus; 14 Divest; 16 Jetsam; 18 Hat case; 19 Mason; 20 Abandoned; 21 Cue; 22 Temperament. **Down:** 2 Ill; 3 Stays; 4 Bolero; 5 Outdone; 6 Omnibuses; 7 Looked ahead; 8 Versemonger; 12 Novitiate; 15 Stand up; 17 Meaner; 19 Madam; 21 Can.

Cryptic 2
Across: 6 Bigoted; 7 Fence; 9 Pilot; 10 Lucifer; 12 Deerstalker; 14 Current news; 18 Groping; 19 Atoll; 21 Ferry; 22 Inherit. **Down:** 1 Digit; 2 Morose; 3 Bed; 4 Denial; 5 Schemer; 8 Mustang; 11 Ironing; 13 Quarter; 15 Report; 16 Wither; 17 Plain; 20 End.

Sudoku solutions

Medium 1

6	4	5	7	3	2	8	1	9
8	2	1	6	9	5	4	7	3
7	3	9	1	4	8	6	5	2
9	7	3	8	2	4	1	6	5
5	1	8	3	7	6	2	9	4
2	6	4	9	5	1	3	8	7
4	8	7	5	1	3	9	2	6
1	9	2	4	6	7	5	3	8
3	5	6	2	8	9	7	4	1

Medium 2

9	2	8	3	5	7	4	6	1
6	4	7	9	1	8	5	3	2
1	5	3	6	2	4	8	9	7
4	6	1	5	7	9	2	8	3
8	9	5	2	3	1	6	7	4
7	3	2	8	4	6	1	5	9
5	7	9	1	8	2	3	4	6
3	1	4	7	6	5	9	2	8
2	8	6	4	9	3	7	1	5

Hard 1

5	4	8	1	6	7	9	2	3
9	7	6	2	5	3	4	1	8
1	2	3	8	4	9	7	6	5
4	3	9	6	2	5	1	8	7
8	6	2	7	3	1	5	9	4
7	5	1	9	8	4	2	3	6
3	8	7	4	9	2	6	5	1
2	1	5	3	7	6	8	4	9
6	9	4	5	1	8	3	7	2

Hard 2

2	6	3	7	5	4	8	9	1
4	7	1	9	8	2	3	5	6
8	5	9	3	6	1	7	2	4
9	1	5	6	7	8	4	3	2
7	2	8	4	1	3	5	6	9
6	3	4	2	9	5	1	8	7
5	4	7	8	2	6	9	1	3
1	9	2	5	3	7	6	4	8
3	8	6	1	4	9	2	7	5

Numberfit solutions

1

■	■	6	6	3	2	5	4	■
■	4	4	2	3	5	■	6	1
1	6	■	2	4	4	1	2	1
1	5	5	■	3	■	3	0	1
1	2	3	4	■	4	3	2	1
1	0	3	■	3	■	5	5	4
4	1	1	2	1	2	■	6	2
1	3	■	5	2	4	1	3	■
■	6	3	0	3	0	7	■	■

2

■	9	4	■	5	3	4	8	9
9	■	5	3	3	6	■	■	2
7	2	6	■	4	7	2	■	7
2	9	■	6	9	0	8	5	1
7	5	4	2	■	5	4	2	8
3	8	6	0	5	2	■	8	1
1	■	4	2	4	■	4	9	8
1	■	■	4	5	4	8	■	5
5	4	3	2	5	■	9	3	■

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Sudoku — medium 1

	4			3			1	
8			6		5			3
		9		4		6		
	7		8		4		6	
5		8				2		4
	6		9		1		8	
		7		1		9		
1			4		7			8
	5			8			4	

Sudoku — medium 2

9	2	8				4		
6			9		8			
1					4	8		7
	6			7		2	8	
			2		1			
	3	2		4			5	
5		9	1					6
			7		5			8
		6				7	1	5

Sudoku — hard 1

			1	6		9		3
		6			3			
	2					7		5
4					5		8	
8								4
	5		9					6
3		7					5	
			3			8		
6		4		1	8			

Sudoku — hard 2

2				5		8		
			9	8	2			
						7		4
	1				8		3	
7	2						6	9
	3		2				8	
5		7						
			5	3	7			
		6		4				5

Numberfit

Fit the listed numbers into each grid.

■	■							■
■						■		
		■						
			■		■			
				■				
			■		■			
						■		
		■						■
■							■	■

■			■					
	■					■	■	
			■				■	
		■						
				■				
						■		
	■				■			
	■	■					■	
					■			■

Numberfit 1

2 digits: 13 – 16 – 17 – 61 – 62 – 64
3 digits: 103 – 155 – 240 – 250 – 254 – 301 – 554 – 622
4 digits: 1234 – 1335 – 3123 – 3343 – 4321 – 5331
5 digits: 44235 – 52413
6 digits: 111141 – 111142 – 244121 – 411212 – 630307 – 663254
8 digits: 46202563 – 46520136

Numberfit 2

2 digits: 29 – 81 – 93 – 94
3 digits: 284 – 424 – 456 – 464 – 472 – 489 – 498 – 726
4 digits: 2958 – 4548 – 5289 – 5336 – 5349 – 5428 – 5455 – 7542
5 digits: 53489 – 54325
6 digits: 367052 – 386052 – 620242 – 690851
8 digits: 92718185 – 97273115

CLASSICAL LANGUAGES

PETER TRUDGILL on the sometimes surprising languages spoken by some our greatest composers

Music is sometimes said to be the universal language; and it is certainly true that the music of the great classical composers is as well known these days in China, South Korea and Japan as it is in its original European homeland.

But the languages which the composers themselves actually spoke are not often thought of as being an interesting or important topic. Surely it is all pretty straightforward? Tchaikovsky was a Russian, so he must have been a Russian speaker; Grieg was Norwegian and therefore, obviously, his mother tongue was Norwegian.

Often, however, the facts are actually not so mundane. Anyone with an interest in symphonic music knows that Sibelius was Finnish. In fact, he is one of Finland's great national heroes. But it would be a mistake to suppose that because of that his native language was Finnish. Jean Sibelius, as he chose to be known, was originally named Johan Julius Christian Sibelius and was born into a Swedish-speaking family who called him "Janne".

Finland is officially a bilingual country, with both Finnish and Swedish as official languages. Ninety percent of the population are Finnish-speakers, but there are two major areas of Finland which have been predominantly Swedish speaking for many centuries, one on the south coast, and one on the west coast. Also, the autonomous Åland Islands off the southwest coast of Finland are almost entirely Swedish speaking. From the age of nine, though, Sibelius went to a Finnish-medium school so his Finnish did become fluent, even if he was not always too confident about it.

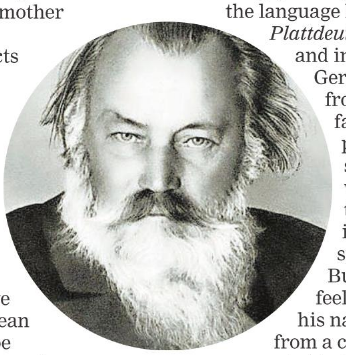
Fryderyk Szopen was also bilingual, in his case in Polish and French. He is more usually known by the French version of his name, Frédéric Chopin, but he was born in Zelazowa Wola, in Poland, and lived there until he was 20. He grew up speaking French as well as Polish because, although his mother was Polish, his father was French.

Fryderyk/Frédéric was proficient in both languages, and could write both well. When he died at the young age of 39, he was buried in Paris, where he had spent most of his adult life and had risen to international fame, but his heart was taken back to Poland where it is still interred at the Bazylika Swietego Krzyza, or Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw.

In contrast, the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg was a bit disappointing on the bilingualism front. His great-grandfather was Alexander Greig, who came from Aberdeen. (Norwegians pronounce the re-spelt version of the name as "Grigg".) The family maintained their links to Britain for several generations – Grieg's godmother was a Mary Stirling from Stirling, and his father, also called Alexander, made frequent business trips to London.

Grieg himself, however, did not speak English at all well, although it is said to have improved in later life after a number of visits to England.

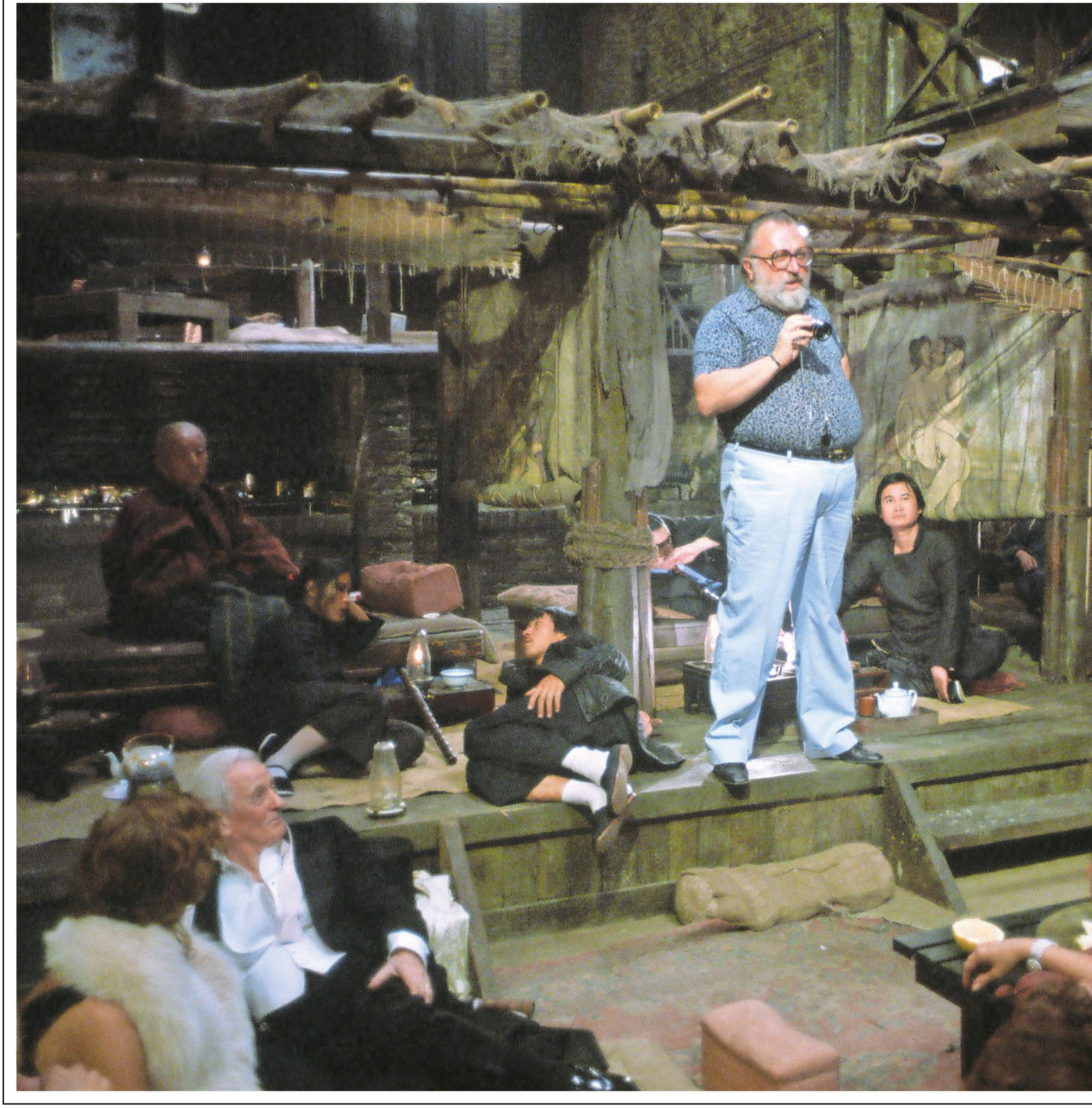
Johannes Brahms was a much more accomplished bilingual. We might suppose that, as a German, his native language was German. But he grew up in Hamburg speaking the local variant of the language known in German as *Plattdeutsch* or *Niederdeutsch*, and in English as Low German. Brahms came from a fairly well-to-do family and was also perfectly comfortable speaking German, which would have been the language he spoke in Vienna where he spent much of his life. But the depth of his feeling for the language of his native city can be gauged from a conversation he is reported to have had with the Low German poet Klaus Groth, who asked him why he did not set any verses in his native language to music, only poems in German. Brahms replied: "It doesn't work. I just can't. Low German is too close to me, it's something more than just language to me. I have tried, but it doesn't work." For Brahms, *Plattdeutsch* was "something that comes straight from the heart".



BILINGUAL: German composer Johannes Brahms pictured in 1897, the last year of his life Photo: Getty Images

SYMPHONY

The word *symphony* comes from Ancient Greek *symphonía*, which consisted of *syn-*, 'with', and *phoné*, 'sound', so the meaning was 'concord, harmony, concert of music'. After 2,000 years, the word still survives with a very everyday meaning in Greece. In Modern Greek, if you want to say 'I agree', you say *symphonó*.



PIONEER: Director Sergio Leone on the set of his sprawling gangster epic *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984)
Photo: Getty Images

GREAT EUROPEAN LIVES

BY CHARLIE CONNELLY

#145 SERGIO LEONE

JANUARY 3, 1929 – APRIL 30, 1989

Few directors can claim to have redefined a single genre more than Sergio Leone. Between 1964 and 1971 he made five westerns, films that rendered everything that had gone before immediately obsolete and maintain a tangible influence on everything made since.

None of his sand-blasted, sweltering works, with the exception of a few scenes in the last, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, were filmed in the US and the director himself spoke little English, communicating with his Anglophone actors through an interpreter. Yet they revolutionised the way we think about the old west and, by extension, the notion of America itself.

Leone's films were riddled with the incongruous. They combined an oppressive stillness with operatic levels of melodrama. There was the wide open space of the landscape paired with tight, unforgiving facial close-ups. Dialogue was usually sparse and terse, all the eloquence buried in movement. There were long build-ups, silent but for the mournful sound of the wind, a hand moving slowly to a holster, the twitch of a cheroot, the squint of an eye, building an unbearable tension that would be released like a dam bursting in a wild flurry of bullets lasting no more than a few seconds.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of his work was the way he blurred the divide between good and bad. Until Leone arrived with 1964's *A Fistful of Dollars* westerns had been broadly free of nuance; the good guys and bad guys clearly demarcated even by the colour of their hats. From the early silent days of William S. Hart through Gary Cooper to John Wayne, the old west had been romanticised to the point of total sanitisation.

From the moment Clint Eastwood first appeared on screen as the enigmatic Man with No Name in *A Fistful of Dollars*, shooting first and not asking questions afterwards, those days were consigned to history. Bad guys would still lose but they'd lose because they'd been outwitted by a faster mind and a faster gun that didn't necessarily belong to a fine, upstanding pillar of society. Winning the climactic gunfight didn't make you automatically the good guy: if Leone's films showed anything it was the absence of an inherent rule that in the febrile atmosphere of 19th century America the forces of good would always triumph. In his screenplays vengeance and justice made easy bedfellows.

"I've always been fascinated by evil because underneath you often find that bad is in some ways better than good," said Leone. "The west was made by violent, uncomplicated men and it is this strength and simplicity that I try to capture in my movies."

Leone's America benefited from the eye of the outsider. He spent very little time there, living in Italy and making his westerns in Spain.

Born in Rome, he was steeped in cinema. His father Vincenzo was one of Italy's first film stars and noted directors, appearing in more than 60 films under the name Roberto Roberti. His mother, Bice Valerian, had also taken leading roles in a number of early Italian films, many of them directed by her husband.

As a boy Leone divided his spare time between his father's film sets and the cinema, watching Italian films and those imported from America dubbed into Italian. Gary Cooper was an early favourite, seducing the wide-eyed boy with an America boasting a strong moral compass and clear division between right and wrong when on the streets outside fascism was taking a firm hold on Italy. Then the war came and America stepped out of the cinema screen onto the streets of Rome.

"During my childhood America was like a religion to me," Leone said. "Then real-life Americans abruptly entered my life in jeeps and upset all my dreams. I found them invigorating but also very deceptive. They were no longer the Americans of the west they were just soldiers like any others, materialists, acquisitive, keen on pleasures and earthly goods."

The grandsons of the cowboy heroes he'd seen on screen were not the clean-cut heroes he'd expected, they were whiskery and smelt bad, they got drunk and seduced women. In his films Leone's America would be populated by these soldiers of liberation.

Although he'd planned to study law when he left school Leone went straight into the film business, working with great Italian directors such as Vittorio de Sica, with whom Leone worked as a production assistant on the Academy Award-winning 1948 *Ladri di Biciclette* (*The Bicycle Thieves*). In the following decade he worked his way up to second-unit director on a range of spear-and-sandals epics of the 1950s filmed in Italy: *Quo Vadis*, *Helen of Troy* and *Ben Hur*.

His directorial break came by accident in 1959 when Mario Bonnard was taken ill on the first day of shooting *The Last Days of Pompeii* and Leone was asked to take over. Bonnard was unable to return to the set and, although he wasn't credited officially at the time, Leone did more than enough to earn his first full directing commission on the 1961 epic *The Colossus of Rhodes*.

In 1964 Leone finally realised his ambition of making a cowboy film. The first high-profile 'spaghetti western', *A Fistful of Dollars* brought Italian filmmaking sensibilities to what Leone regarded as a genre that still had appeal, especially in Europe, but one that had become too tired and repetitive.

With shooting taking place in Spain, Leone found it hard to source an American actor for the lead. James Coburn was too expensive. Lee Marvin said no. Charles Bronson turned it down saying it was the worst script he'd ever seen. It took a while but eventually, on the advice of Italy-based American actor Richard Harrison, who had also turned down the role, Leone alighted on a young television actor called Clint Eastwood. When Harrison showed Leone an episode of the television series *Rawhide* the director was struck instantly by Eastwood's presence.

"His languidness, his laid-back quality, is what came over so clearly," he recalled. "It was exactly what I was looking for."

When Leone brought in composer and old schoolfriend Ennio Morricone to complete his team and provide a soundtrack that echoed the vastness of the landscape and intensity of the drama, the future of the western was reset.

Once Upon a Time in the West, released in 1968, was arguably his masterpiece. Its lengthy opening scene in which three hit men await Charles Bronson's character Harmonica at a remote, near-derelict railway station is notable for the almost complete absence of action. One of the hoodlums traps a fly in the barrel of his gun and listens to the buzzing. Another stands beneath a leaky water tank in the ceiling, letting the water drip onto his hat. With shots of an empty railway track stretching to the horizon it's as if time itself has come to a halt. This menacing stillness, oppressive heat and glacial passage of time is for Leone the essence of the old west, the antithesis of the milling of wagons and noisy posses that often comprised the attention-grabbing openings of traditional westerns. Then when the chief villain shoots a homesteading family dead, administering the *coup de grâce* to a small boy from close range, the camera pans up to reveal the face of all-American good guy Henry Fonda, another startling subversion of American mores.

Leone's last film was his first non-western since *The Colossus of Rhodes*, the sprawling 20th century gangster epic *Once Upon A Time in America* starring Robert de Niro. Vast in scope with a narrative spanning 40 years, the film Leone made was four hours long. To the director's horror Warner Brothers then cut an hour and a half for theatrical release – a process so clumsy it removed Morricone's name from the opening credits – and the film flopped at the box office. The full version was subsequently released and widely hailed as a masterpiece, its influence tangible in subsequent gangster films from *Goodfellas* to *The Irishman*.

For a man who was a visitor to the nation at best Sergio Leone managed to hold a mirror up to America and reflect authentic sensibilities that bumped against the accepted national narrative. The spaghetti westerns in particular, with their nihilism and unprecedented level of graphic violence, chimed perfectly with the counterculture of the 1960s in the US and beyond.

"America doesn't belong to the Americans," said Leone. "They're just borrowing the idea for a while."

WILL SELF

Multicultural Man ..
on hanging on to humour

Like Sigmund Freud before me, I've been working on a grand unified theory of humour. For Freud, laughter ensues when the repressed desires of the id are released from the unconscious by the superego, such that the ego (that's you), clutches his or her sides and involuntarily lets out a peal of laughter. For Self (that's me), nothing much is funny anymore – and I've been wondering, following Freud, whether this is because my superego has grown too repressive, or my id too impotent. Alternatively, in could be that conditions in pandemic Britain – with this week the Farceur-in-Chief resuming the cap, bells and inflated pig's bladder of office – simply aren't sufficiently amusing to raise a wan smile – let alone a great Johnsonian guffaw.

Another possibility is that Freud's theory is bunkum. After all, what is this 'unconscious' of which he and his disciples speak – can you touch it, see it, examine it under a microscope? I think not. No, surely it's far more likely that I don't find anything much funny anymore because I've been listening to permanent adolescents of one kind or another 'doing' the *Dead Parrot* sketch since the early 1970s. That's a lot of pining for the fjords. Indeed, my principal refinement of Freud's theory is really to do with repetition – it isn't so much that nothing much is funny anymore; it's that nothing much is funny twice. "Wit," the great Oscar Wilde wisely pronounced "is the epitaph of an emotion." And who wants to officiate at the funeral of one's own sensibility when, like some affective zombie, it rises from the dead.

I can see a number of objections to my conception of humour's eternally unfunny recurrence – principal among them is that what's so mirth-murdering here is not the joke (no matter how past-its-sell-by-date it may be), but the theory. If it's a truth universally acknowledged that comedians, in daily life, are some of the least amusing people imaginable – then how much more humourless are academics who specialise in jokes? Over the years I've been approached by several of these types, wishing to investigate the humour in my own oeuvre, only to find them to be the dullest, most boring individuals imaginable. Presumably that's why they were attracted to the field in the first place – just as converts to peaceful Buddhism are often the angriest people, and those to Christianity the least forgiving.

Religion is, by tradition, a funny business in and of itself – although nowadays woe betide anyone who cracks a joke in a public forum that can be perceived as having any minority whatsoever as its butt. I'm not going to claim that being able to make jokes about Buddhists and Christians – or Muslims and Jews for that matter – is a licence that guarantees the persistence of humour, but two things are worth noting. One is that we tend to laugh at markedly different things in private to the ones we do in public, whatever confession we belong to – and the second is that no humour can truly result in an explosive release of (hopefully not virion-laden) breath, unless it involves a sudden reversal. This can be the resounding defeat of our expectations, or the revelation of an unknown unknown – the proverbial black swan, soaring up out back passage – but its net effect has to be that, at least for a moment, we find ourselves in freefall, our most sacred values shattered, and our most firmly-held beliefs slipping from hilarity-greased fingers.

ONE OFF: John Cleese and Michael Palin in Monty Python's Dead Parrot sketch Photo: Don Smith/Radio Times via Getty Images

Freud also believed there was such a thing as tendentious humour – whereby the sudden release of tension is occasioned not by a *bouléversément*, but its inversion: the abrupt re-confirmation of our underlying prejudices, when we've been lulled into expecting their funny upending. It's this kind of tendentious humour people refer to when they say 'the old ones are the good ones', and then proceed to wildly cachinnate purely on the basis that some people's spouses have mothers, or that some other people have dark skin. To most of us it's precisely this sort of humour that isn't even worthy of the name – but what I venture to suggest is that it's all too often countered not with its true opposite, which is genuine absurdity, but with another version of tendentiousness: humour that reconfirms us in our inclusive and liberal beliefs.

I said it was being around for so long that had rendered the world unfunny for me – but I suspect that since the pandemic got going, plenty of you have joined me at this end-of-the-end-of-the-pier-show. For if what makes us laugh is a crack in normality through which the true chaos that surrounds can get in then now is not the time for it. On the contrary, as at daily press briefing after press briefing, we see our destiny seemingly being determined by a government of dullards led by an erstwhile wiseacre, it's hard not to long for a world in which the reverse is the case, and the current chaos seeps away into the dullest most pedestrian cosmos conceivable. All of which is by way of saying: they're really dying out there. And so are we.

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